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TOP SECRET

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10th December, 1947

CABINET

POSSIBILITY OF A THREE-POWER TREATY ON GERMAN  
DISARMAMENT

MEMORANDUM BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

AT the present Conference of Foreign Ministers it is becoming clear that the fundamental differences between the Powers occupying Germany persist and are unlikely to be resolved. We must therefore consider the situation which will arise in the event of a breakdown.

2. It is probable that a failure of the Conference will result in negotiations between ourselves, the United States and France for the fusion of the three Western Zones, and in the carrying out of other measures necessary for the organisation of Western Germany. The French have already told us that they fear that such action will lead to a serious deterioration in the relations of the Western Allies with the Soviet Union. Before exposing themselves to the risks which this situation would entail they are therefore anxious to know on what military support they could count, not, in the first place at any rate, against Germany, but in the case of a clash involving Western Europe.

3. This is a consequence of a breakdown of the present Conference which must clearly be faced. We are economic partners in Germany with the United States, and if four-Power agreement is impossible we must in any case, in co-operation with them, take various measures for the organisation of the Combined Zone from which in the hope of such agreement we have previously held back. In my opinion it is therefore most important that in deciding how to deal with the situation envisaged by the French we should act in close consultation with the United States.

4. I consider that the wisest solution of the problem is to explore the possibilities of applying the United States draft treaty for the disarmament and demilitarisation of Germany, which was originally proposed by Mr. Byrnes, to the Western Zones in Germany. This would have the advantage not only of answering the French fears of the Soviet Union, but also both of committing the Americans to Europe and of ensuring that, in Western Germany at least, the Germans would be kept disarmed. Furthermore, by using the present draft four-Power treaty as a basis, and by drafting it in such a form that it would be open at any time for the Soviet Union to adhere, we should avoid the appearance of a three-Power treaty directed solely against the Russians, which would have a very bad effect on public opinion and would dangerously exacerbate a relationship already seriously strained.

5. I therefore request the agreement of the Cabinet that I should take action on these lines, consulting with the United States before formally suggesting the possibility of a three-Power treaty to France. I am asking for this authority now, as the drafting of such a treaty is by no means easy. Since there will be need to act quickly, if the present session of the Council of Foreign Ministers breaks up, prior approval by my colleagues will enable me to complete the necessary drafting more quickly.

E. B.

Foreign Office, S.W. 1,  
10th December, 1947.

