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By AM NARA Date 6/24/09

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THE SECRETARY OF STATE  
WASHINGTON

January 30, 1969

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: The State of European Thinking about the  
NATO Tactical Nuclear Weapons Issue

At your request, we have prepared the enclosed information memorandum on "The State of European Thinking about the NATO Tactical Nuclear Weapons Issue". This assessment of European thinking about the NATO tactical nuclear weapons issue is based not on general public statements or editorial comment but rather upon the three years of discussions at the Defense Minister level on a highly classified basis in the NATO Nuclear Planning Group and its immediate predecessor, the Special Committee. This group consists of four permanent members, the US, the UK, Federal Republic of Germany, and Italy, plus three rotating memberships currently held by Greece, Belgium and Denmark.

The memorandum deals with various aspects of the problem under the following general headings:

- I. Differences between European and US outlook on role of tactical nuclear weapons in over-all strategy.
- II. Dilemmas relating to tactical use of nuclear weapons.
- III. Elements of consensus and of difference defined by NPG.
- IV. Status of European effort to draft guidelines on use of nuclear weapons.
- V. European thinking on consultation about use of tactical nuclear weapons.

  
William P. Rogers

Enclosure

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E.O. 12958, as amended, Sect 3.5 Per Ltr. Apr. 10, 2009

NLM 02-69/7: Per Sec 3.3(b)(4)(c), 6.2(c)

By P. H. NARA Date 5-12-09

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The State of European Thinking about the  
NATO Tactical Nuclear Weapons Issue

SUMMARY

I. Differences between European and US outlook on role of tactical nuclear weapons in over-all strategy.

Prior to 1967 official NATO strategy was based on the concept of massive retaliation. In May 1967, NATO, under US leadership, accepted a strategy based on the doctrine of "flexible response". This recognizes the need for at least limited conventional and possibly nuclear response prior to a strategic nuclear exchange. However, formal agreement to a new strategy has not removed all of the issues with respect to the role of tactical nuclear weapons. The very definition of "tactical nuclear weapons" poses the fundamental difference in US and Allied views on such weapons. Nuclear weapons for use on European battlefields are "tactical" to us, "strategic" to the Europeans. Discussions in the NATO Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) have highlighted to the Europeans the devastating damage to Europe of what we call a tactical nuclear engagement. Nevertheless, the Europeans perceive credible deterrence in terms of an early use of tactical nuclear weapons designed to pose the risk to the attacker of the use of US strategic forces. The US, while vitally concerned with deterrence, is also concerned with the problems of limiting escalation should deterrence fail.

The French continue to oppose NATO's strategy of "flexible response" with a doctrine calling for immediate strategic response to any aggression. The Force de Frappe is a function of that doctrine although France shows some interest in battlefield nuclear weapons to support French conventional forces.

II. Dilemmas relating to tactical use of nuclear weapons.

Discussions in the NPG have not yet produced any agreed policies on how nuclear weapons should be used but they have produced an increased awareness of some of the dilemmas posed by any proposed use of tactical nuclear weapons.

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III. Elements of consensus and of difference defined by NPG.

-- NPG members are generally agreed that the total stockpile in Europe [REDACTED] is adequate in size.

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-- The NPG continues to find difficulty in devising a doctrine for first use and even more, for use of more than a few nuclear weapons.

-- The US has tended to emphasize the risks of crossing the nuclear threshold at all; our European Allies stress the importance of posing the risk of nuclear use at an early stage of conflict as a deterrent to aggression. SANITIZED

-- Some NATO countries [REDACTED] in particular) have pressed for special control measures over atomic demolitions that will permit early use on NATO territory. The US has resisted any pre-delegation of authority to military commanders for use of nuclear weapons. Per Sec 6.2(a)

IV. Status of European effort to draft guidelines on use of nuclear weapons.

The European members of the NPG have pushed for the early establishment of policy guidelines for the use of nuclear weapons. The US has urged careful study before any policies are adopted. The May NPG meeting will see the first effort to reach agreement on policy guidelines. This effort is likely to bring into sharper focus some of the underlying differences between the US and the Europeans on the role of nuclear weapons in deterrence and defense. However, initial reports on the guidelines now being drafted by the UK and the FRG suggest that our differences will not be too great.

V. European thinking on consultation about use of tactical nuclear weapons.

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The Europeans, [REDACTED] have urged development of detailed procedures describing how decisions to use nuclear weapons will be made. The US has been reluctant to adopt inflexible procedures that might limit the President's options. However, continued reluctance by us to adopt some procedures may be interpreted by our Allies as unwillingness to share adequately in vital decisions respecting nuclear use.

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The State of European Thinking about the  
NATO Tactical Nuclear Weapons Issue

I. Differences in European and US outlook on role of  
tactical nuclear weapons in over-all strategy

The principal difference between the US and our NATO Allies in strategic discussions over the last several years has been in the relative emphasis given to deterrence and battlefield defense. The Allies generally place greater emphasis on maintaining a credible deterrent by posing the threat of nuclear retaliation to any aggression. The US though vitally concerned with deterrence is also more concerned with the question of how, if deterrence should fail, a war might be fought in the European theater in such a way as to minimize damage and the risk of escalation to a strategic exchange.

This difference, based as it is on a fundamentally differing outlook, geographic location and national interest, can understandably never be completely bridged. The destruction wrought by tactical nuclear weapons would occur primarily in Europe; the destruction wrought by a strategic nuclear exchange would involve primarily targets in the US and USSR.

Prior to 1967, the issue was debated in the context of the NATO Strategy Document (MC 16/3) which many Allies interpreted in terms of an essentially "massive retaliation" response to Soviet aggression in Europe.

In May 1967, NATO under US leadership accepted a strategy paper based on the so-called "flexible response" which recognizes the need for at least limited conventional and possibly nuclear response prior to a strategic nuclear exchange.

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As a result, the issue is no longer so clearly drawn. The question is no longer "massive retaliation" vs... "flexible response" but rather a matter of degree -- how much of a response should be given with conventional or tactical nuclear weapons in the European theater before escalating to a strategic nuclear exchange?

The NATO Strategic Concept document tends to "paper over" the fact that the US has tended to favor a generally higher (though undefined) nuclear threshold and thus larger conventional forces than most of our Allies are willing to accept.

In concrete terms this has been reflected in differences on the following issues:

-- How long, how far forward and against how large a non-nuclear threat should NATO forces plan to defend before using nuclear weapons?

-- Should NATO plan on using tactical nuclear weapons to counter superior Warsaw Pact forces or only to signal the threat of escalation to a strategic exchange?

Despite differing emphasis,

a. Europeans have wanted and continue to want the US strategic nuclear guarantee even though some like the French have raised doubts about the firmness of that guarantee;

b. At the same time, though there is as yet little clarity in European thought as to the purpose of these weapons, Europeans have also wanted the physical presence of US tactical nuclear weapons in Europe. They remain very sensitive to any suggestion of possible withdrawal or even reduction in the stockpile of US nuclear weapons in Europe.

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France has a different view on the use of nuclear weapons. The French view of Alliance strategy calls for immediate strategic action in the event of an aggression against NATO territory. The French do not accept the current NATO doctrine of flexible response, but would launch a strategic nuclear bombardment of the enemy rear areas at the outset. They consider that this would cause the aggressor to stop the invasion rapidly, and would make a battlefield defense possible without the abandonment of territory.

The French make no distinction between limited and major aggression, and consider a radical response is necessary to any aggression. Therefore, the French consider that an adequate defense is not possible if only conventional forces, or even tactical nuclear weapons, are employed against aggressor forces.

Nonetheless, the French Army continues to be interested in tactical nuclear weapons systems. This interest reflects a realization that, notwithstanding the present French view of NATO doctrine, contingency planning must proceed for the defense of NATO territory, and for the possibility of French cooperation in that defense, within the framework of established NATO concepts. The French consider that any decision to employ nuclear resources must be very prompt, and that a forward defense line should be installed in order to measure and define a marked aggression before unleashing a defensive nuclear strategy. Nonetheless, it has been a consistent French view that their own forces would not be stationed on such a forward line. Instead their forces would apparently be used primarily to defend an advance on French territory.

The UK, as the first European nuclear power, largely shares the views attributed above to the NATO Allies in

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general. The UK, for reasons of budget and European policy, has been somewhat more outspoken than the others in pressing the European point of view.

## II. Dilemmas relating to tactical use of nuclear weapons

The chief political forum within NATO for nuclear discussions has been the Nuclear Planning Group, a seven nation group, consisting of Defense Ministers. These discussions have not yet produced any clearer policies on how nuclear weapons should be used. They have, however, indicated various national views and have produced an increased awareness of some of the dilemmas posed and choices to be made in any proposed use of tactical nuclear weapons.

Examples of these dilemmas are:

1. If nuclear weapons are used, early use is desirable to limit the loss of territory and to avoid resort to larger scale use at a later stage in the conflict which will result in greater destruction; but considerable time for decision is required since the first use of a nuclear weapon has immense political and military consequences.
2. If nuclear weapons have to be used, their use in small numbers is less likely to be escalatory; but use in small numbers leaves one open to large scale retaliation from the full nuclear capability of the enemy.
3. Use of nuclear weapons on one's own territory may be less escalatory; but it also produces more collateral damage on one's own territory.
4. Predelegation of authority to military commanders will assure prompt response; but it takes vital decisions out of the hands of the political leadership where they belong.

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5. Strict political control of nuclear strikes is desirable to limit escalation; but detailed centralized political control of a rapidly changing battlefield situation is not practicable.

6. If deterrence is to continue to work, the members of the Alliance must continue to manifest their determination to use nuclear weapons if necessary to defend NATO territory; but it is becoming increasingly clear that the use of nuclear weapons in large numbers could have disastrous effects and that even limited use involves significant risks of escalation.

III. Elements of consensus and of differences defined by the NPG

1. Sufficiency of the nuclear stockpile in Europe

There has been formal agreement in the NPG that the stockpile of nuclear weapons (principally tactical) in Europe [REDACTED] is sufficient; that the main issues are what yields, ranges and means of delivery, etc. This, in turn, depends on what doctrine should govern the use of tactical nuclear weapons. None of the studies done to date in the NPG have demonstrated how NATO could use more than a small fraction of these [REDACTED] without destroying most of Europe. Nevertheless, NATO and US military commanders continue to support a requirement for more of certain types of weapons (e.g., atomic demolition weapons). Even though we could undoubtedly get general agreement among the NATO countries that the present stockpile is excessive from a strictly military standpoint, we would encounter serious political difficulties if we were to suggest a reduction in the stockpile. There would be concern in Europe that this would weaken deterrence, and that once we started to reduce, there would be no end to the process.

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## 2. Uncertainties of first use by NATO

Last year the NPG did a series of studies on first use of nuclear weapons by NATO. The NPG concluded that first use "is not necessarily in NATO's interest." However, this does not mean our Allies are prepared to abandon the option for first use, or to publicly forswear first use because of the belief that such a policy would weaken deterrence.

## 3. Implications of further use

One of the factors which lead to the conclusion that first use was not necessarily in NATO's interest was the recognition that initial use by NATO could be followed by retaliation and by a process of escalation which would bring massive destruction to Europe. The US has stressed in the NPG the need to look beyond first use, to confront the real problems of escalation. Many of our Allies have been reluctant to do so because this poses an unsolvable dilemma. On the one hand, first use by NATO crosses the nuclear threshold and risks retaliation and widespread destruction in Europe. On the other hand, if NATO appears too reluctant to use nuclear weapons, the deterrent is weakened. The studies to date in the NPG have focused on very limited use by both sides, but studies now underway are examining wider use.

## 4. Views on specific categories of use

a. ABM's - In the fall of 1967, following the US decision to deploy SENTINEL, the NPG members agreed that an ABM deployment in Europe was not in NATO's interest "under present circumstances." At the time, the British made an effort to obtain NPG endorsement of a statement that an ABM in Europe would never be in NATO's interest. Others, notably the Germans and the Italians, declined to

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endorse such a sweeping statement. The question of an ABM for Europe is quiescent at present but would almost surely become active were the US ever to decide on deployment of an ABM system more extensive than SENTINEL to protect US cities against a Soviet attack.

b. ADM's - The ADM is a small-yield nuclear weapon used for demolition and to create barriers, particularly in mountainous terrain. The utility of ADM's has been studied quite extensively in the NPG, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The ADM has been singled out as unique because of its defensive character. Many US and Allied military commanders and some Allied governments believe that ADM's could be used with less risk of escalation because they are to be used only on NATO territory and thus, their defensive character would be clear. Most targets for ADM's are in forward position. Some NATO countries [REDACTED] also contend that because of these unique defensive characteristics and the need for early use of ADM's to gain maximum effectiveness, that some form of predelegation is necessary and might be feasible with respect to ADM's (and perhaps also air defense weapons). However, the US has made quite clear that we were not prepared to predelegate authority to military commanders either to emplace or use ADM's.

As a result and also possibly due to Soviet pressures, the [REDACTED]

The [REDACTED] have sought ways of assuring prompt release of ADM's without actually resorting to predelegation. The NPG has undertaken a study of the time factors involved in release of ADM's with a view to reducing reaction times. This study is still in progress. However, it is clear that a major uncertainty that cannot be quantified is the time it takes to make a decision to release a nuclear weapon.

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The fundamental problem remains that the US has not been prepared to predelegate authority for use [REDACTED] in any event, would like to develop measures which will assure prompt use in case of invasion. The British have generally supported the US position. The Germans in recent years have noticeably cooled on the utility of ADM's once they had examined the potential destruction in Germany that would result from their use. If there is any consensus on this issue, it is that NATO cannot count on early release of ADM's by the US and thus, plans must be developed, where required, that do not rely on the early use of ADM's.

5. Demonstrative use

The US authored a paper on demonstrative use of nuclear weapons (i.e., a shot in the air or into an unpopulated area) which was discussed at the NPG meeting in October 1968. It stressed that demonstrative use was not necessarily risk-free because the attacker might retaliate even against very limited use. Furthermore, the more clearly we signaled that it was a demonstration, the less likely it would have a deterrent effect. While this fact was acknowledged by the other NPG members, there is still propensity to believe that use of a few weapons is safer than the use of many. It is generally agreed that NATO should have an option for demonstration use, and that demonstrations should be against real targets, rather than in remote areas.

6. War at sea

Members of the NPG generally recognize that use of nuclear weapons at sea may be less escalatory than use on the land, but that it also may be less necessary given NATO's presumed superiority at sea. There is also recognition that targets at sea generally are fleeting and that remote command and control of the naval battle is probably impractical.

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### 7. Tactical aircraft

For some years the US has pressed our NATO Allies to devote more of their tactical air forces to conventional, rather than nuclear, missions, or at least to make them dual-capable, i.e., capable of using nuclear or non-nuclear weapons. Recently there has been some recognition of the principle that tactical aircraft should be dual-capable, although there remains a reluctance to spend the funds needed for training and munitions. About a year ago SACEUR appeared to be moving in the direction of removing some of his tactical aircraft from the nuclear strike mission. However, in a December 1968 meeting with the NPG, General Lemnitzer argued that he could not reduce the number of aircraft assigned to the nuclear strike mission because less of the external forces (i.e., US strategic weapons) were being assigned to targets threatening Europe. This is likely to raise a major new issue for the NPG to examine. The problem for the US will be to continue to move our Allies toward a more adequate non-nuclear capability without raising the fear of denuclearization of Europe.

### 8. Small-yield weapons

There is some sentiment in NATO, particularly in the International Staff, for development of very small-yield nuclear weapons. Behind this pressure is the assumption that smaller weapons may make nuclear conflict safer or less destructive. The US has discouraged these pressures for two reasons. First, we have felt that there are now adequate numbers of small-yield weapons (less than [redacted] in the NATO stockpile. Smaller-yield weapons than we now have would not necessarily reduce collateral damage as more would be needed to accomplish a given task. Secondly, the US has not wanted to encourage pressure from other countries which might lead to a costly new development program.

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IV. Status of European effort to draft guidelines on use of nuclear weapons

After two years of preparatory studies and discussions of various tactical uses of nuclear weapons, the NATO Nuclear Planning Group of Defense Ministers meeting at Bonn on October 11, 1968, invited the United Kingdom and Germany jointly to start work designed to develop tentative political guidelines for the NATO military authorities in respect of the possible initial tactical use of nuclear weapons by NATO.

The UK and FRG have begun their joint work in November with an informal target date of March for submission of drafts to members for discussion at the next meeting of NPG in London on May 29-30. The US has asked that the two governments keep in touch with us as their work proceeds.

The problems posed for the US in consultations regarding these prospective guidelines are generally:

1. To avoid the emergence of potentially sharp and divisive differences between the US and European members over basic strategy;
2. To encourage the greatest possible degree of realism in the drafts about the risks inherent in using nuclear weapons without undermining confidence in the deterrent. For the formulation of guidelines for the use of nuclear weapons, like the formulation of the NATO strategy documents which preceded them, will bring with it dangers of unhelpful debates that could tend to undermine European confidence in our commitment and credibility of the deterrent. Conversely, however, just as the formulation of the new NATO strategy paper in 1967 served to broaden areas of agreement rather than to underline disagreements, the forthcoming effort, if well managed, offers similar opportunities.

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Until drafts of the guidelines are available to us specific points at issue cannot be defined. The fact that much study and discussion has preceded the effort to begin drafting guidelines plus the fact that the Germans (as non-nuclear Europeans) and the UK (as nuclear and non-Continental Europeans) have somewhat differing points of view will tend to move their compromise formulations toward a middle ground. The points with which we may want to take issue are likely to be largely matters of degree and emphasis.

Information available on the UK-FRG talks to date indicates that the only current issues between them relate to whether or not to include in draft guidelines the subjects of a) predelegation of authority to use nuclear weapons, and b) constraints on yield and consequent fall-out from tactical nuclear weapons according to the areas where they are to be employed.

V. European thinking on consultation about use of tactical nuclear weapons

In 1962, NATO (except France) agreed to the so-called Athens Guidelines on consultation. They state that "as regards the possible recourse by NATO to nuclear weapons in its self defense", if time permits, "the decision to use nuclear weapons would be subject to prior consultation in the Council".

When the US sought to replace the so-called "hardware" (MLF) approach to NATO nuclear sharing with a "consultative" approach, the Nuclear Planning Group was established. Its charter lists as pertinent subjects for consideration "procedures for the use of nuclear weapons" and "improvements in the machinery for carrying out agreed methods of consultation".

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After inconclusive discussions over the past two years, there is increasing pressure from most NPG members to elaborate and reach agreement on more detailed consultation procedures to flesh out the Athens Guidelines. They hope by so doing to gain greater certainty that all, especially small countries, will have a voice in decisions that affect them. They want new and more concrete evidences of this certainty to demonstrate progress in this matter to their parliaments and publics. In addition, there are institutional interests within NATO which would be served by definition of some defined and assured role for the Permanent Representatives, the Secretary General, the Military Committee, Major NATO Commanders, etc.

The US up to this time has taken the position that while it is willing to explore possibilities objectively in the NPG, it may not be wise to seek much further definition of procedural detail in advance.

It would seem unwise, for example, to suggest that we would limit ourselves to consultation in the North Atlantic Council. We would not wish to discover that this body had been paralyzed in a real crisis by a communications failure or other set of circumstances which made it impossible to consult - or to consult on time - in the Council rather than conducting governmental consultations by other means.

We have tended to consider that the Guidelines should balance in a realistic manner the legitimate desire of all NATO nations for participation in determining the circumstances of the use of nuclear weapons and the need for close political control on the one hand, with the need for flexibility and timely political decisions to support required military actions, on the other.

Finally, we have considered it essential that this balance be maintained if the strength and credibility of

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the Alliance's nuclear deterrent are to be maintained. In order for nuclear weapons to continue to contribute to the deterrence of Soviet aggression in Europe, the Soviets must be certain that we have the will and capability to respond to aggression in timely fashion.

Accordingly, we have been concerned that in our quest for procedures we avoid any tendency toward any rigid, unrealistic or burdensome arrangements that would be inconsistent with our fundamental interests.

It would appear to be very much in our interest on the other hand, to seek diligently within the NPG discussions ways of showing good faith and forward movement in the effort to improve NATO consulting procedures short of impairing the freedom of action essential to deterrence and defense. Ambassador Cleveland has stated the options when he reported that "dragging our feet could cause this to become a fairly major political issue by the time of the May 29 Ministerial Meeting of the Nuclear Planning Group. On the other hand, a more forthcoming US attitude or perhaps acceptance of some general principles can defuse the issue for some time to come."

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