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April 11, 1959

MEMORANDUM OF CONFERENCE WITH THE PRESIDENT
April 7, 1959

Others present: Secretary McElroy
Mr. Bissell
General Goodpaster

The President said he had asked Mr. McElroy and Mr. Bissell to come in to tell them that he had decided not to go ahead with certain reconnaissance flights for which he had given tentative approval the preceding day. He said he wanted to give them his thinking. First, we now have the power to destroy the Soviets without need for detailed targeting. Second, as the world is going now, there seems no hope for the future unless we can make some progress in negotiation (it is already four years since the Geneva meeting). Third, we cannot in the present circumstances afford the revulsion of world opinion against the United States that might occur -- the U. S. being the only nation that could conduct this activity. Fourth, we are putting several hundred million dollars into programs for more advanced capabilities.



In summary, the President said he did not agree that this project would be worth the political costs.

He added that he had called Secretary Dulles who had taken the view that if the planned action were in the East he would see no objection but in the North and South of their sector he would not do it. Mr. Dulles had added that if the current negotiations fail, we must at once get the most accurate information possible.

The President said he agreed on the need for information. This need is highlighted by the distortions several senators are making of our military position relative to that of the Soviets, and they are helped in their "demagoguery" by our uncertainties as to Soviet programs. He was concerned over the terrible propaganda impact that would be occasioned if a reconnaissance plane were to fail. He added that there is some evidence that the Soviets really want a Summit Meeting. The President himself feels that there is need

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to make some kind of progress at the summit, even though we cannot be sure that this is possible. There are, however, some straws in the wind indicating the prospect is not wholly hopeless. He told the group that if at a later time they think the situation has changed, or if a crisis or emergency occurs, or new equipment becomes available, they could raise the matter with him again.



Mr. McElroy said it is far easier for Cabinet officers to recommend this activity than for the President to authorize it, and that he accepted the President's decision very willingly. Mr. McElroy added that currently the Soviet long-range Air Force, which is of very limited size, is the threat. Later, if we do not have solid information, we will have to put our forces on air alert. In addition, there is a need to base our missile program on the hardest possible information regarding the Soviet program.

Earlier the President had discussed this matter at length with me. In response to his request for my advice, I analyzed the proposal as to the importance of possible costs and possible gains, and indicated I would be disposed to favor the two particular actions proposed. I added that, while I had confidence in my analysis of the costs and gains, I felt less sure of the evaluation of their relative importance and would readily defer to the President's own assessment in this respect.


A. J. Goodpaster
Brigadier General, USA

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