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Memorandum of conversation with Ambassador Dobrynin, at lunch, May 17, 1963

The Ambassador and I had a very cheerful lunch, as part of a series of meetings which he is conducting before his return to Moscow on consultation. We began by agreeing that it was a good thing that the date for Secretary Rusk's visit to the Soviet Union had been set, and I congratulated the Ambassador on the opportunity which this would provide him for being out of Washington in the worst week of the year. He expressed his own satisfaction at plans for the Secretary's visit and went on to say that he had had a personal view that three members of this government should visit Moscow at appropriate times -- Secretary Rusk, Robert Kennedy, and myself. He felt that these three visits would create a proper preparation for a visit by the President early in his second term. (At another point in the conversation the Ambassador expressed his own personal conviction that the President was certain of reelection, and at still another point he said that it appeared to him that there was no Republican who was even remotely in a position to challenge the President.)

The Ambassador asked me how I thought things stood between our two countries and where progress could be made. I said that I was sure he had heard from others that the most important single opportunity for progress now was in the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Cuba. I said that I knew of the conversation between the Chairman and Governor Harriman on this point, and that it remained very difficult to see how we could make progress on other issues while this one remained between us. I said that we had not pressed this point hard in public because we thought that it was probably better, if possible, not to appear to apply open international pressure. The Ambassador said that this was entirely correct and gave me quite a long "personal" discourse on the way in which his "proud young country" would react to excited speeches from Senator-this or Congressman-that. I assured him that neither here nor elsewhere was the President interested in scoring public victories. What counted for us was action.

On other subjects the Ambassador and I agreed that there did not seem to be much prospect of any early movement between our two countries. I remarked that his Government seemed to be preoccupied

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with other matters, and he did not dissent. He expressed his regret that there seemed to be no progress on the test ban, and repeated something of the same history which he had earlier discussed with Dr. Wiesner. I told him that we quite understood that there might well have been a misunderstanding between Dean and Kuznetsov, but I said also that we were much disappointed by the remarks in the Chairman's most recent message about the shape and character of inspections. I said that we continued to believe that it was important to know something about the character of the inspection before settling definitely on a number; I said that the question whether one wanted three or seven loaves of bread necessarily depended somewhat on the size and shape of the loaf. While Ambassador Dobrynin was obviously aware of the Chairman's use of the word "symbolic" to describe the inspections the Soviet Government had in mind, he insisted that if in fact we had agreed on three inspections in December, we would have found that the Soviet Government had fully prepared position papers which would have in fact made the three inspections real and useful. He of course repeated the standard Soviet view that no inspections are needed.

In response to a further question as to where I thought progress might now be made, I said that I would make an entirely personal suggestion, which was that the nuclear posture of Communist China must be a matter of real common interest to us. I said that I recognised the sensitivity of this topic, in the light of the relations between the Soviet Union and Communist China, which was called a member of the Socialist camp, but I said that I knew the President believed that this problem was one on which it would be useful to have a quite private and serious exchange of views. Ambassador Dobrynin's reply was to say that our new plans for nuclear forces in NATO did not make it easier for the Soviet Government to deal with the question of Chinese nuclear ambition. He pressed his arguments against the multilateral force rather more strongly than I would have anticipated, and indicated that while he and more sophisticated observers could understand -- without necessarily accepting -- our argument that this was a way of preventing a still worse result, Russian opinion as a whole would not be so understanding. I emphasized as strongly as possible the arguments for binding the Germans safely in this fashion, instead of leaving them a prey to dangerous Gaullist fancies or other adventurous notions. (I nevertheless drew the inference from Dobrynin's tone that while the MLF is being organised, and until it becomes a fait accompli, it may be hard to make any nuclear arrangements with the Soviet Government. Once it is in place, like NATO itself, it may be accepted as a fact of life from which to proceed.)

The Ambassador and I had a brief exchange about Laos in which the only novelty was that he did seem clearly to understand and to agree when I said that the maintenance of the position of Souvanna Phouma was essential to the agreement between the President and the Chairman. I pointed out that the danger to Souvanna now came from his side of the line, and while he gave certain standard answers about the accusations made by each side against the other, I think he took the point.

At a number of points in the conversation, the Ambassador and I talked about the importance of private and reliable communication. He repeated what he had said to Dr. Wiesner about the Chairman's disappointment when reports of his December offer dribbled out in incomplete and inaccurate form very quickly on our side, and Dobrynin indicated that while he himself understood how such things could happen in our Government, it was quite another matter to explain them to the Chairman. I agreed that there was a problem here and undertook again to indicate our own interest in maintaining privacy. I also said that, in my judgment, if the Soviet Government were interested in further efforts on the nuclear testing problem it would be important to arrange for intense discussion in some entirely private and unnoticed way. The Ambassador said that the Soviet Government could accept any means of communication that would serve this purpose, since its own ability to keep secrets was not in question. I accepted this point, remarking simply that this was one of the reasons why we were forced to take a different view of the problem of inspection. I repeated that I knew the President was still deeply interested in a test ban and would be glad to see this matter examined intensively on a very quiet basis, although, as I again repeated, we were disappointed by the Chairman's last letter.

McGeorge Bundy