

**May 6, 1961**

**State Department Telegram 5245 to US Embassy  
United Kingdom, forwarding message from  
President Kennedy to Prime Minister Macmillan**

**Citation:**

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**Summary:**

In this telegram, President Kennedy expresses doubts about aiding the French nuclear program to British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan. He maintained that such an action would shake NATO and signify a "major reversal" in U.S. opposition to "Nth country programs," subsequently increasing Germany's desire to acquire nuclear weapons.

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# OUTGOING TELEGRAM Department of State

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EXCISE REVIEW

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Date: 3/6/92

SS SENT TO: Amembassy LONDON PRIORITY 5245  
RPT: Amembassy OSLO TOSEC 24

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**EYES ONLY FOR THE AMBASSADOR.**

You are requested to deliver the following message to the Prime Minister from the President.

QTE May 8, 1961

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

I am most grateful for your thoughtful and helpful letter of April 28 and the memorandum attached thereto.

I may shortly send you my thoughts on the several issues which these papers raise. There is one question, however, which I would like to clarify now.

After careful review of the problem, I have come to the conclusion that it would be undesirable to assist France's efforts to create a nuclear weapons capability. I am most anxious that no erroneous impressions get abroad regarding future U.S. policy in this respect, lest they create unwarranted French expectations and serious divisions in NATO.

*If we* were to help France acquire a nuclear weapons *HTS*

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capability, this could not fail to have a major effect on German attitudes.

The fact that the Germans are not now tempted to join or imitate the French program is due, in no small part to U.S. opposition to Nth country programs and to the uncertain prospects of the French (or any other) program in the absence of U.S. aid. If we were now to provide aid to France, and thus signify a major reversal in our opposition to Nth country programs, the likelihood that the Germans would eventually wish to acquire a nuclear weapons capability would be significantly increased.

Any such German intent would, of course, shake NATO to its foundations - not to mention the other serious dangers attendant on proliferation of nuclear weapons capabilities. The damaging effect of stirring up German interest in acquiring a nuclear weapons capability would not, I believe, be offset by a French agreement to consult about use of French nuclear forces or to commit these forces to NATO, in return for our aid.

I believe, therefore, that we should try to respond to some of the concerns underlying the French program, instead of helping that program. This may tend to reduce the pressures behind the French program, at least in the long run. It will strengthen, rather than

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weaken, the Chancellor in resisting any pressures in Germany to create a nuclear weapons capability. And it will enhance, rather than undermine, the cohesion of the Alliance as a whole.

An effort to respond to underlying French concerns might involve such steps as:

1. Guaranteeing that the U.S. will continue to maintain an effective nuclear capability in NATO Europe for the life of the Treaty.
2. Sharing information about the extent of that capability, i.e., the number and the power of the weapons which comprise it, in greater degree with our allies, particularly the French.
3. Giving our allies an opportunity to share in the control of this capability, to the degree consistent with its military effectiveness. The French might be invited to take the lead with our allies in devising specific proposals to this end. Such proposals might eventually lead to North Atlantic Council agreement both on guidelines concerning use of these weapons and on a political method for concerting about that use in an emergency.
4. Committing more U.S. and U.K. nuclear forces in NATO Europe to NATO command. We have in mind committing a number of U.S. polaris submarines to NATO. I hope that, as we do, you will be able to give serious consideration to committing U.K. strategic nuclear forces in

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the U.K. to NATO. I welcome the indication in your memorandum that you increasingly view the British nuclear capability as being designed to make a contribution to the Western deterrent as a whole.

5. Giving the French more explicit and high-level assurances, such as we have given you, concerning the U.S. intent to consult, if time permits, about use of nuclear weapons anywhere in the world.

6. Perhaps most important of all: Intimate political consultation with the French, consistent with the rights and interests of our other allies, in order to make clear our desire to secure French participation in the formulation of global policy. As you know, one of the arguments sometimes given for the French nuclear program is that only thus can France secure a voice in framing worldwide policies.

I realize that these measures will not dissuade General de Gaulle from pressing his nuclear program. But I am hopeful that they will diminish, at least in the post-de Gaulle period, the vigor with which France prosecutes that program. In the meantime, measures such as these will permit us to develop a useful, close, and constructive partnership with France in other vital respects and they will offer the best chance of maintaining NATO cohesion over the long term.

I may send you further thoughts on the other useful and interesting proposals in your letter. Again, let me tell you how grateful I am

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Embassy LONDON

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for your wise counsel. Sincerely yours,

The Right Honorable

Harold Macmillan

Prime Minister

London, England

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Original being pouched.

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