

October 10, 1963

**Memorandum of Conversation between President
Kennedy and Foreign Minister Gromyko,
'Non-Dissemination and the MLF'**

Citation:

"Memorandum of Conversation between President Kennedy and Foreign Minister Gromyko, 'Non-Dissemination and the MLF'", October 10, 1963, Wilson Center Digital Archive, JFKL, NSF, box 187, USSR, Gromyko Talks, President. Contributed to NPIHP by Bill Burr. <https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/177767>

Summary:

In this conversation, President Kennedy and Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko discussed the Soviet attitude toward the MLF. Gromyko argued that it would be a barrier to a nonproliferation agreement. Kennedy made the standard argument that "one of the reasons for an MLF was to make it less possible for the Germans to press for nuclear weapons of their own."

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Non-dissemination and MLF

DATE: October 10, 1963

PARTICIPANTS: US

TIME: 4:00 p.m.

The President
The Secretary
Ambassador Thompson
Assistant Secretary Tyler
Mr. Akalovsky, ACDA/IR

PLACE: White House

USSR
Foreign Minister Gromyko
Deputy Foreign Minister Semenov
Ambassador Dobrynin
Mr. Sukhodrev, Foreign Ministry

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Mr. Gromyko then raised the question of non-dissemination. He said that he did not wish to repeat the Soviet views on this matter although he did wish to say that it was good that the views of the United States and the USSR coincided to the extent that other states which have no nuclear weapons should have no such weapons. This was good as far as it went, but it was here that disagreement began. The US appeared to limit the task to non-dissemination of nuclear weapons to states, whereas the USSR approached the

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problem more broadly and believed that states should also not have access to nuclear weapons indirectly, or through an alliance. As he had told the Secretary, the USSR attached importance to non-dissemination but the obstacle to agreement was the US plan for a NATO multilateral force.

The President said that as Mr. Gromyko knew we had gone to great length to prevent dissemination. This was why we had our difficulties with France. Our particular concern regarding dissemination was Germany, and one of the reasons for an MLF was to make it less possible for the Germans to press for nuclear weapons of their own, weapons which could be used without US consent. We did not believe that an MLF would create a situation worse than the one existing now. In this connection, the President noted that de Gaulle had talked about some nuclear force scheme, but apparently Bonn preferred the US plan. In any event, the MLF was not in existence; and some countries had reservations about it. However, he believed that if the MLF plan failed there would be a vacuum in which countries would seek nuclear weapons which could be used without US consent.

Mr. Gromyko wondered why a vacuum would exist if there was no MLF. He asserted that if there were a universal non-dissemination agreement to which West Germany adhered, the task of non-dissemination would be resolved with the participation of the United States, the USSR and others. So he could not see any vacuum; the problem would be resolved by a broad arrangement.

The Secretary commented that, as Mr. Gromyko knew, China was a preoccupation to us. If China should explode a bomb other countries would start pressing for nuclear weapons for themselves. Therefore we would like very much to have a non-dissemination agreement waiting for the outcome of the MLF plan.

Mr. Gromyko contended that even from the US point of view a broad agreement would be better than pushing the MLF project. Of course the US spoke for itself -- and here he said he meant the Chinese aspect of the problem-- but the USSR had given thought to this problem and believed that a broad arrangement would be better even from the standpoint of the US.

The President wondered why this was so.

Mr. Gromyko said because all nuclear states would undertake not to give weapons or information to other states. If the Chinese did not join, that would make their political situation more difficult and delicate.

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The President asked when Mr. Gromyko thought the Chinese would explode a bomb.

Mr. Gromyko said he did not know and added that the USSR did not give anything to the Chinese.

The President then stressed the need for continuing efforts with regard to non-dissemination, noting an MLF would take a long time.

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