

Communiqué of John F. Kennedy and Harold Macmillan on nuclear defence systems (Nassau, 21 December 1962)

Caption: In 1962, the purchase of US Polaris missiles by the United Kingdom provokes tensions between Britain and France, as the British decision clashes with France's desire to establish an independent nuclear deterrent in Europe.

Source: Western European Union Assembly-General Affairs Committee: A retrospective view of the political year in Europe 1962. March 1963. Paris: Western European Union Assembly-General Affairs Committee. "Communiqué issued after the meeting between President Kennedy and Mr. Macmillan, Nassau (21 December 1962)", p. 105-106.

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Statement on Nuclear Defence Systems, 21 December 1962

1. The President and the Prime Minister reviewed the development programme for the SKYBOLT missile. The President explained that it was no longer expected that this very complex weapons system would be completed within the cost estimate or the time scale which were projected when the programme was begun.
2. The President informed the Prime Minister that for this reason and because of the availability to the United States of alternative weapons systems, he had decided to cancel plans for the production of SKYBOLT for use by the United States. Nevertheless, recognising the importance of the SKYBOLT programme for the United Kingdom, and recalling that the purpose of the offer of SKYBOLT to the United Kingdom in 1960 had been to assist in improving and extending the effective life of the British V-bombers, the President expressed his readiness to continue the development of the missile as a joint enterprise between the United States and the United Kingdom, with each country bearing equal shares of the future cost of completing development, after which the United Kingdom would be able to place a production order to meet its requirements.
3. While recognising the value of this offer, the Prime Minister decided, after full consideration, not to avail himself of it because of doubts that had been expressed about the prospects of success for this weapons system and because of uncertainty regarding date of completion and final cost of the programme.
4. As a possible alternative the President suggested that the Royal Air Force might use the HOUND DOG missile. The Prime Minister responded that in the light of the technical difficulties he was unable to accept this suggestion.
5. The Prime Minister then turned to the possibility of provision of the POLARIS missile to the United Kingdom by the United States. After careful review, the President and the Prime Minister agreed that a decision on POLARIS must be considered in the widest context both of the future defence of the Atlantic Alliance and of the safety of the whole Free World. They reached the conclusion that this issue created an opportunity for the development of new and closer arrangements for the organisation and control of strategic Western defence and that such arrangements in turn could make a major contribution to political cohesion among the nations of the Alliance.
6. The Prime Minister suggested and the President agreed, that for the immediate future a start could be made by subscribing to NATO some part of the forces already in existence. This could include allocations from United States Strategic Forces, from United Kingdom Bomber Command, and from tactical nuclear forces now held in Europe. Such forces would be assigned as part of a NATO nuclear force and targeted in accordance with NATO plans.
7. Returning to POLARIS the President and the Prime Minister agreed that the purpose of their two Governments with respect to the provision of the POLARIS missiles must be the development of a multilateral NATO nuclear force in the closest consultation with other NATO allies. They will use their best endeavours to this end.
8. Accordingly, the President and the Prime Minister agreed that the United States will make available on a continuing basis POLARIS missiles (less warheads) for British submarines. The United States will also study the feasibility of making available certain support facilities for such submarines. The United Kingdom Government will construct the submarines in which these weapons will be placed and they will also provide the nuclear warheads for the POLARIS missiles. British forces developed under this plan will be assigned and targeted in the same way as the forces described in paragraph 6.
9. These forces, and at least equal United States forces, would be made available for inclusion in a NATO multilateral nuclear force. The Prime Minister made it clear that except where her Majesty's Government may decide that supreme national interests are at stake, these British forces will be used for the purposes of international defence of the Western Alliance in all circumstances.

10. The President and the Prime Minister are convinced that this new plan will strengthen the nuclear defence of Western Alliance. In strategic terms this defence is indivisible, and it is their conviction that, in all ordinary circumstances of crisis or danger, it is this very unity which is the best protection of the West.

11. The President and the Prime Minister agreed that in addition to having a nuclear shield it is important to have a non-nuclear sword. For this purpose they agreed on the importance of increasing the effectiveness of their conventional forces on a world-wide basis.