

For the file

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June 24, 1943.

MEMORANDUM OF CONFERENCE WITH THE PRESIDENT:

The President called me in to lunch today and the primary discussion was on S-1, although anti-submarine warfare and various other matters came in for partial discussion. I explained the reasons for my visit to England on anti-submarine warfare.

He asked me how things were going and I told him that we were going ahead very aggressively and were on schedule. I explained to him that we were still riding three main horses, and one or two auxiliary matters. I told him that we expected in September to have a basis for a good review of where we stood and at that time we might find it possible to bet on two horses instead of three, but that as matters stood at the present time we just could not believe that it was wise to do anything except to keep full pressure on on all possibilities, and he nodded and agreed. He asked me about time schedule and I gave him a rather careful statement based on the discussion in the Policy Committee this morning. This centers on January 1, 1945, with probabilities that shift as the time is shifted in either direction, with of course the explanation that early arrival at an end result would be the arrival at a rather isolated result and not at a frequently repetitive series. In giving this estimate I followed quite closely the estimate as Conant has made it for me recently and as Groves seemed to agree this morning, bringing out, of course, the hazardous nature of the venture in an unexplored field. He then asked me about where the enemy stood. I told him of our almost complete lack of good information. I also told him of German targets and the arrangements now under way. I made it clear that the Germans were doing serious work on this before we were and that they might therefore be ahead of us, and again expressed the possibilities in the form of probability ratios following this morning's conversation. He then himself discussed what the enemy attitude of mind would be if they felt they had this coming along, and were inclined to remain on the defensive until it could eventuate. We then spoke briefly of the possible use against Japan, or the Japanese fleet, and I brought out, or I tried to, because at this point I do not think I was really successful in getting the idea across, that our point of view or our emphasis on the program would shift if we had in mind use against Japan as compared with use against Germany.

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He then brought up the site in the State of Washington and in that connection said he thought there had been very little leak so far, but that the construction of this very large plant might produce leak. I explained to him why we had to have a plant at that point on account of isolation, power, water, and so on, and he was quite satisfied apparently that an appropriate site was being used. However, in connection with the matter of leakage he told me that the plan came up the other day, I judge at Cabinet meeting, and that Mr. McNutt said "he knew all about this and it was on a very secret matter". I told the President that perhaps that was all Mr. McNutt knew—that it was a very secret matter, secret to him as well as everyone else, and we had a laugh at this point. However, he evidently is impressed with the question of proper secrecy, and I told him I thought the time might come when he would have to call in a rather select group and tell them something to a sufficient extent to get their cooperation in preventing it from being talked about. I did this very generally, and at a time when he was practically suggesting the same sort of thing, because he was querying me about whether some cock and bull story could be made to spread, and saying that perhaps if we got the right group and gave them a story to the effect that this was for a nitrogen fixation plant or the like that it might turn ideas in a wrong direction. I told him that the trouble with telling that story was that sometime later people might want us to produce a lot of fertilizer, and we treated the whole matter as usual on a rather light plane. However, it was at that time I said that I thought telling enough of the true story to give the background to an appropriate group might be in order, and he seemed to think this might be combined with the cock and bull story and asked me to see if I could think of an appropriate one.

He asked me about the control of materials. I told him about the general ore situation rather roughly and something of our general relations with Canada in regard to processing ore and the like.

I told him that we had three or four key scientific chaps who were heading up important groups on this thing and that I might want to get him to sign a letter to each one of these and tell him that he was doing important work and so on, and he said that would be excellent.

The most important point, however, was when he asked me about how relations with the British now stood. I asked him whether Harry Hopkins had reported to him our conversation with Lord Cherwell and he told me that he had not done so. I therefore told him that we had had a most extraordinary interview with Cherwell which had left me completely amazed at the British point of view, and I recounted the substance of that interview as I have it recorded in a memorandum made just after the interview occurred. I told the President that immediately after the conversation with Cherwell I had made careful record of the conversation and put it in my file, and he said "I am glad you did" or words to that effect. When I recounted that Cherwell had placed the whole affair on an after-the-war military basis, the President agreed that this was astounding. I said that I could not conceive of asking for an affair on that basis unless it were part of a trade, and that I thought we might as well sit tight on British relations, since our program is not suffering for lack of interchange and since the British had practically quit their efforts on the matter, and the President nodded rather vigorously and did not ask me to do anything more on this aspect of the subject. Several times in the conversation the subject came back to this matter of the British position and every time it was on a basis where the President seemed to be amazed that they could take such a point of view. He said at one point for example, he thought Cherwell was a rather queer-minded chap. The last words as I left the office he referred again to the extraordinary nature of the British position, and I suggested that he get Harry Hopkins to tell him about the conversation with Cherwell. It is quite evident from this conversation that the President has no intention of proceeding farther on the matter of the relations with the British, for I doubt if he had really thought about the matter since he saw me last, and the fact that he had not even gotten the story from Hopkins is certainly significant. It is also very clear that I have no instructions to do anything except to proceed as we are.

We had a somewhat brief discussion of after-the-war aspects of this whole affair, and the President said he felt that it would probably be necessary to prevent commercial use, by which I understood he felt that all practice would need to be under government control on account of the dangers of various sorts. I told him at this point that I was following out his instructions and getting just as complete patent control in my hands as possible and that both industries and universities had cooperated in this generously by making complete assignments to the government of inventions made in the course of

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the program, and that there were very few outsiders or recalcitrants. I told him that there were one or two cases of patents in the hands of outsiders where I might find it desirable to purchase in order to clear up a possible threat, but I thought this would not cost more than \$100,000 and that I thought I ought to go ahead and do it in order to round out the patent situation. He did not say "go ahead", but neither did he make any comment to the contrary, but rather nodded and we went on to other aspects of the matter. I hence judge that it would be in accordance with his general opinion as to proper procedure for me to purchase outstanding rights to a reasonable extent if the matter so develops that this is possible.

The outcome of the conversation as far as possible actions are concerned seems to be as follows. I have no errand to carry on for the President while in England and I am not instructed to take any steps in regard to relations with the British. The President is expecting some sort of a summary from us along in September. He will apparently be quite willing to sign letters to a few selected scientists. He looks favorably, apparently, on taking up the question of secrecy with some group, and is quite concerned about the subject of secrecy, and in particular would like to see a good cock and bull story developed.


V. Bush