

## 'The Kennedy-Macmillan agreement and the West's new strategy', from Corriere della Sera (22 December 1962)

**Caption:** On 22 December 1962, the day after the signing of the Nassau Agreement, the Italian daily newspaper Corriere della Sera comments on the United Kingdom's decision to arm itself with US Polaris missiles and discusses the various views on nuclear deterrence in Europe.

**Source:** Corriere della Sera. 22.12.1962, n° 288; anno 87. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "La nuova strategia occidentale nell'accordo Kennedy-Macmillan", auteur:Stille, Ugo , p. 1.

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Talk of a historic turning-point

## The Kennedy-Macmillan agreement and the West's new strategy

**The 'Nassau Agreement' is the first practical step towards the goal of genuine integration of nuclear weapons — The United States offers Polaris missiles to France as well — Non-nuclear countries like Italy may also be able to take part in the future collective nuclear force**

From our special correspondent

Nassau, 21 December.

The agreement reached in the Bahamas between President Kennedy and the British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, under which the United States will supply Britain with a Polaris missile force which London will subsequently make available as part of a multilateral Atlantic deterrent, not only ends the serious crisis between the two allies over the Skybolt missile, but also represents what the American leaders are keen to see as a 'historic turning-point' in the strategy of the West as a whole.

The 'Nassau Pact' (a formula used today by United States Defence Secretary Robert McNamara in a conversation with journalists to stress the exceptional importance of the agreement) goes well beyond bilateral relations between the United States and Britain and is the first practical step towards Washington's goal of a genuine 'Atlantic integration' of nuclear weapons.

The agreement can be summarised as follows:

(1) America undertakes to supply Great Britain, in place of the Skybolt missile, whose production has been suspended in the United States, with a Polaris missile force which will enable the British to keep their nuclear deterrent alive after long-range bombers have become unable to mount a nuclear strike. Great Britain will purchase these Polaris missiles from the United States and will retain full ownership of them.

Great Britain will also fit British-produced nuclear warheads on the Polaris missiles. The missiles will be installed on board nuclear submarines which Great Britain will build with some technical, and possibly even financial, assistance from America (although nothing has yet been settled as regards the tricky financial issue). The cost of a nuclear submarine with sixteen Polaris missiles is estimated at around one hundred and sixty million dollars.

The father of the American nuclear submarine force, Admiral Rickover, is likely to visit London shortly to make initial contact with the British experts. A British technical and financial mission will then visit Washington at the beginning of next year. According to current plans, Britain's nuclear submarines should be ready between 1968 and 1970.

### **Multilateral deterrent**

(2) Great Britain undertakes to make its Polaris-based nuclear deterrent available to the Atlantic Alliance as part of a multilateral deterrent to be set up in the future. Great Britain will retain the right to use its nuclear deterrent outside NATO in cases of 'supreme national interest', i.e. if there is an extremely serious crisis which does not involve the Atlantic Alliance. The United States, in its turn, will also provide a future collective Atlantic deterrent with a nuclear missile force equivalent to the force that Great Britain makes available to the Alliance.

(3) America offers to conclude a bilateral agreement with France similar to that agreed in the Bahamas with Great Britain. In this respect, President Kennedy today sent a message to General de Gaulle. If de Gaulle were to accept the proposal, France would acquire American Polaris missiles (which they would fit out with French-produced nuclear warheads) on the proviso that such a force was included in the future multilateral Atlantic deterrent.

(4) The nuclear missile forces to be made available to NATO by the United States, Great Britain and France (subject of course to acceptance of the Kennedy proposals by de Gaulle) would form the 'core' of the future collective Atlantic nuclear force, in which the 'non-nuclear' countries of the Alliance would also be invited to take part.

### **Mixed crews**

The way in which 'non-nuclear' countries (including Italy) are to take part does not yet seem to have been decided. The thinking at present is for the nuclear submarines fitted with Polaris missiles made available to NATO to have 'mixed', i.e. multinational, crews. This is a complex problem, however, which will need further examination.

The United States intends, if General de Gaulle accepts their offer, to put a detailed plan before the Atlantic Council and to set in motion the procedural machine for the creation of a collective multilateral Atlantic deterrent.

(5) As the first immediate step to prepare the way for NATO's future 'integrated nuclear force', Kennedy and Macmillan have agreed that the United States will immediately make available a number of their strategic bombers (i.e. nuclear attack bombers) to NATO Command and Great Britain will arrange for the British Bomber Command to do the same.

Initial comments being made this evening by the British and American delegations show that both sides are satisfied with the agreement reached, although it is symptomatic that this satisfaction is taking different forms.

The British are stressing that Great Britain will continue to have its own nuclear deterrent and that the United States has agreed to its continuation. The Americans, for their part, are placing more of a stress on the new development of the multilateral deterrent and are pointing out that Great Britain has in substance accepted the Washington government's arguments about the need for 'Atlantic integration' of Europe's various national deterrents.

The official press communiqué at the end of the conference was skilfully drafted, as might have been expected, so as to encompass both partners' claims.

It is nevertheless clear that if the immediate political demands of Macmillan, who will have to return to London with concrete evidence that he has kept the British nuclear deterrent alive, have been satisfied, the main factor in the basic approach to the problem has been the strategic focus of the American government, which clearly wants to channel Europe's nuclear defence into a collective deterrent.

The key to future developments lies in General de Gaulle's reaction, which is difficult to predict, to the American offers.

De Gaulle seems to be a 'silent partner' in the Nassau conference. Physically absent, his political presence has been felt to a surprising degree, and one of the more paradoxical developments of the Bahamas agreement is precisely that de Gaulle seems to be one of its main beneficiaries.

There has in practice been a 'rescaling' of the status of America's various allies. Great Britain has to some extent seen a 'reduction' of the 'special relationship' which it has always had with the United States, while France has gained a new status, on a par with Great Britain.

A further consequence of the Nassau agreements is that de Gaulle's arguments have been accepted, albeit in part. The plan for a multilateral Atlantic deterrent contained in the Nassau agreements will necessarily have to be developed around a nuclear core formed by the weapons of the three western nuclear powers, the United States, Great Britain and France. This is something for which de Gaulle has always called.

Ugo Stille