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LETTER DATED 8 MARCH 1962 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE
ACTING SECRETARY-GENERAL

On the instructions of my Government I have the honour to transmit the following documents concerning the forthcoming negotiations on disarmament at Geneva:

1. Message of the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to Chairman Khrushchev of the Soviet Union dated 7 February 1962;
2. Message of President Kennedy to Chairman Khrushchev dated 14 February 1962;
3. Message of President Kennedy to Chairman Khrushchev dated 25 February 1962.

I would be grateful if you would have the text of these messages circulated to all Members of the United Nations.

(Signed) Adlai E. STEVENSON
Permanent Representative of the United
States of America to the United Nations

Text of Message from President Kennedy and Prime Minister Macmillan
to Nikita Khrushchev, 7 February 1962

Dear Mr. Chairman,

We are taking the unusual step of addressing this message to you in order to express our own views, as well as to solicit yours, on what we can jointly do to increase the prospects of success at the new disarmament negotiations which will begin in Geneva in March.

We are convinced that a supreme effort must be made and the three of us must accept a common measure of personal obligation to seek every avenue to restrain and reverse the mounting arms race. Unless some means can be found to make at least a start in controlling the quickening arms competition, events may take their own course and erupt in a disaster which will afflict all peoples, those of the Soviet Union as well as of the United Kingdom and the United States.

Disarmament negotiations in the past have been sporadic and frequently interrupted. Indeed, there has been no sustained effort to come to grips with this problem at the conference table since the three months of meetings ending in June of 1960, over a year and a half ago. Before that, no real negotiations on the problem of general disarmament had taken place since negotiations came to an end in September 1957.

It should be clear to all of us that we can no longer afford to take a passive view of these negotiations. They must not be allowed to drift into failure. Accordingly, we propose that we three accept a personal responsibility for directing the part to be played by our representatives in the forthcoming talks, and that we agree beforehand that our representatives will remain at the conference table until concrete results have been achieved, however long this may take.

We propose that our negotiators seek progress on three levels. First, they should be instructed to work out a programme of general and complete disarmament which could serve as the basis for the negotiation of an implementing treaty or treaties. Our negotiators could thus build upon the common ground which was found in the bilateral talks between the United States and the USSR which took

place this summer, and which were reflected in the Statement of Agreed Principles of 20 September 1961. Secondly, our negotiators should attempt to ascertain the widest measure of disarmament which would be implemented at the earliest possible time while still continuing their maximum efforts to achieve agreement on those other aspects which present more difficulty. Thirdly, our negotiators should try to isolate and identify initial measures of disarmament which could, if put into effect without delay, materially improve international security and the prospects for further disarmament progress. We do not believe that these triple objectives need conflict with one another and an equal measure of urgency should be attached to each.

As a symbol of the importance which we jointly attach to these negotiations, we propose that we be represented at the outset of the disarmament conference by the Foreign Ministers of our three countries, who would declare their readiness to return to participate personally in the negotiations as the progress made by our permanent representatives warrants. We assume, in this case, the Foreign Ministers of other States as well will wish to attend. The status and progress of the conference should, in addition, be the subject of more frequent communications among the three of us. In order to give impetus to the opening of the disarmament negotiations, we could consider having the Foreign Ministers of our three countries convene at Geneva in advance of the opening of the conference to concert our plans.

At this time in our history, disarmament is the most urgent and the most complex issue we face. The threatening nature of modern armaments is so appalling that we cannot regard this problem as a routine one or as an issue which may be useful primarily for the scoring of propaganda victories. The failure in the nuclear test conference, which looked so hopeful and to the success of which we attached such a high priority in the spring of 1961, constitutes a discouraging background for our new efforts. However, we must be resolved to overcome this recent setback, with its immediate consequences, and forego fruitless attempts to apportion blame. Our renewed effort must be to seek and find ways in which the competition between us, which will surely persist for the foreseeable future, can be pursued on a less dangerous level. We must view the forthcoming meetings as an opportunity and a challenge which time and history may not once again allow us.

We would welcome an early expression of your views.

Text of President Kennedy's Reply to N. Khrushchev's
Letter of 10 February 1962

14 February 1962

Dear Mr. Chairman,

In reading your letter of 10 February 1962 I was gratified to see that you have been thinking along the same lines as Prime Minister Macmillan and myself as to the importance of the new disarmament negotiations which will begin in Geneva in March. I was gratified also to see that you agree that the Heads of Government should assume personal responsibility for the success of these negotiations.

The question which must be decided, of course, is how that personal responsibility can be most usefully discharged. I do not believe that the attendance by the Heads of Government at the outset of an eighteen-nation conference is the best way to move forward. I believe that a procedure along the lines of that outlined in the letter which Prime Minister Macmillan and I addressed to you on 7 February is the one best designed to give impetus to the work of the conference.

I agree with the statement which you have made in your letter that there exists a better basis than has previously existed for successful work by the conference. The Agreed Statement of Principles for Disarmament Negotiations which was signed by representatives of our countries on 20 September 1961 and which was noted with approval by the sixteenth General Assembly of the United Nations represents a foundation upon which a successful negotiation may be built.

As you have recognized, there still exist substantial differences between our two positions. Just one example is the Soviet unwillingness so far to accord the control organization the authority to verify during the disarmament process that agreed levels of forces and armament are not exceeded.

The task of the conference will be to attempt to explore this and other differences which may exist and to search for means of overcoming them by specific disarmament plans and measures. This does not mean that the conference should stay with routine procedures or arguments or that the Heads of Government should not be interested in the negotiations from the very outset. It does mean that much

clarifying work will have to be done in the early stages of negotiation before it is possible for Heads of Government to review the situation. This may be necessary in any case before 1 June when a report is to be filed on the progress achieved.

I do not mean to question the utility or perhaps even the necessity of a meeting of Heads of Government. Indeed, I am quite ready to participate personally at the Heads of Government level at any stage of the conference when it appears that such participation could positively affect the chances of success. The question is rather one of timing. I feel that until there have been systematic negotiations - until the main problems have been clarified and progress has been made - intervention by Heads of Government would involve merely a general exchange of governmental positions which might set back, rather than advance, the prospects for disarmament. It is for these reasons that I think that meetings at the highly responsible level of our Foreign Ministers as well as the Foreign Ministers of those other participating States who wish to do so would be the best instrument for the opening stages.

A special obligation for the success of the conference devolves upon our two Governments and that of the United Kingdom as nuclear Powers. I therefore hope that the suggestion made in the letter of Prime Minister Macmillan and myself to you, that the Foreign Ministers of the three countries meet in advance of the conference in order to concert plans for its work, will be acceptable to the Soviet Government.

Text of Message from President Kennedy to
Nikita Khrushchev, 25 February 1962

Dear Mr. Chairman,

I regret that in your message of 21 February you seem to challenge the motivations of Prime Minister Macmillan and myself in making our proposal of 7 February that the forthcoming disarmament conference open at the Foreign Minister level. I believe that there can be a legitimate difference of opinion on the most effective and orderly way to make progress in the vitally important field of disarmament. You have presented your own views and I do not wish to imply that they are motivated by anything other than your own conviction that the way you suggest is the best way to proceed. However, I must say that even though I have given the most careful thought to the considerations you advance, I continue to hold to my view that the personal participation in Geneva by the Heads of Government should be reserved until a later stage in the negotiations when certain preliminary work has been accomplished.

Indeed, some of the statements you make reinforce my view in this respect. Your discussion of the control problems, for example, is based, in my view, on a fundamental misconception of the United States position that can probably best be clarified in the light of discussion of specific verification requirements for specific disarmament measures. It is not true, as you allege, that the United States is seeking to establish complete control over national armaments from the beginning of the disarmament process. Our position is a quite simple one and it is that whatever disarmament obligations are undertaken must be subject to satisfactory verification. For example, if, as we have both proposed, there is an agreement to reduce the level of armed forces to a specified number, we must be able to ensure through proper verification mechanisms that this level is not exceeded. I do not propose here to discuss this subject at length. I wish merely to point out that this is the type of issue on which more work should be done before it can usefully be dealt with at a Heads of Government meeting.

If it were not for the existence of the Statement of Agreed Principles which was worked out so laboriously between representatives of our two countries last year, there might be greater force to your reasoning that Heads of Government

should meet at the outset to set directions for the negotiations. In my view, the Statement of Agreed Principles constitutes just the type of framework which would be the most that could be expected at this point from a meeting of the Heads of Government. Since this has already been done, I believe now we need to have our representatives do further exploratory work of a more detailed nature.

As I have said and as I now repeat, I think it is of the utmost importance that the Heads of Government of the major nuclear Powers assume a personal responsibility for directing their countries' participation in and following the course of these negotiations. I can assure you that the Secretary of State would present my views with complete authority. Even so, I hope developments in the conference and internationally would make it useful to arrange for the personal participation of the Heads of Government before 1 June. I do not, however, believe that this should be done at the outset and I must say frankly, Mr. Chairman, that I believe this view is well founded. I believe that to have such a meeting at this point would be to begin with the wrong end of the problem. The Heads of Government should meet to resolve explicit points of disagreement which might remain after the issues have been carefully explored and the largest possible measure of agreement has been worked out at the diplomatic level.

I continue to hope that you will agree to the proposed procedure which was set forth in Prime Minister Macmillan's and my initial letter of 7 February. I believe that the replies which have been made by other prospective participants to your messages indicate a general support for this approach and I trust that you will give a favourable response.

I cannot conclude this letter without mentioning briefly the problem of nuclear testing. Since I assumed the office of President of the United States, the conclusion of a nuclear test agreement has been a primary objective of mine. The record of American participation in the negotiations on this subject has demonstrated fully the creative effort we made to achieve agreement. It must be understood that in the absence of an agreement which provides satisfactory assurance that all States will abide by the obligations they undertake, there is no real basis for securing a safe end to the competition in the development of nuclear weapons. It is strange for the Soviet Union, which first broke the truce on nuclear testing, now to characterize any resumption of testing by the United States as an aggressive act.

It was resumption of testing by the Soviet Union which put this issue back into the context of the arms race and that consequently forced the United States to prepare to take such steps as may be necessary to ensure its own security. Any such steps could not be characterized now as "aggressive acts". They would be matter of prudent policy in the absence of the effectively controlled nuclear test agreement that we have so earnestly sought.

In our 7 February message, the Prime Minister and I attempted to lay a further framework for the conduct of the negotiations. We believe that in a preliminary meeting among the Foreign Ministers of the United States, United Kingdom and USSR views could be exchanged and agreement reached on the three parallel approaches we suggested and on some of the procedural aspects of which we might jointly recommend to guide the Committee's work. Such a discussion, together with the Statement of Agreed Principles, could give a valuable direction and impetus to the Committee's work.

Mr. Chairman, I think you agree that we must approach this meeting with utmost seriousness and dedication if we are to avoid a gradual drift to the same kind of aimless and propaganda-oriented talk which has characterized so much of past disarmament negotiations. This can be best achieved if we who are ultimately responsible for the positions we take, and our chief diplomatic officials, concern ourselves directly, as we are now doing, with this subject. I believe we should consider most carefully as we proceed when and how our actual participation at the conference table could be of most benefit.
