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October 16, 1957

MEMORANDUM OF CONFERENCE WITH THE PRESIDENT  
October 15, 1957, 11 AM

Others present:      Dr. I. I. Rabi  
                            Dr. L. V. Berkner  
                            Dr. H. A. Bethe  
                            Dr. D. W. Bronk  
                            Dr. J. B. Fisk  
                            Dr. C. P. Haskins  
                            Dr. A. G. Hill  
                            Dr. J. R. Killian, Jr.  
                            Dr. E. H. Land  
                            Dr. H. Scoville, Jr.  
                            Dr. A. T. Waterman  
                            Dr. J. B. Wiesner  
                            Dr. J. R. Zacharias  
                            Dr. D. Z. Beckler  
                            General Cutler  
                            General Goodpaster

The President said he had wanted to have the group in to learn their state of mind and to see what ideas and proposals they might have that they would like to advance. He said he had been reflecting very earnestly on the question of how all of the many scientific activities throughout the government, or supported by the government, could be best supported. He referred to certain paragraphs in the National Science Foundation brochure on basic research. He said it is all well and good to accept the importance of basic research, but government officials have some responsibility to assure that money provided is actually used for research, and not diverted to other ends. However, to do so might result in intrusion into university activity. He asked whether the group really thought that American science is being out-distanced, and asked for an expression of the state of mind of the members.

Dr. Rabi said that the problem the President had mentioned, of management of research in government, is of course of central concern to his

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group. He added that if the President wanted the group to do something about it, they could certainly make some suggestions to him. The President asked specifically how this work might proceed, and General Cutler suggested (and it was agreed) that the committee might prepare and submit a draft of terms of reference for such a study.

Dr. Rabi then went on to speak of our scientific position now and in the next few years in relation to the Soviets. He said that we can now see some advantages on our part. However, the Soviets have picked up tremendous momentum, and unless we take vigorous action they could pass us swiftly just as in a period of twenty to thirty years we caught up with Europe and left Western Europe far behind.

At Dr. Rabi's request, Dr. Land then spoke -- with great eloquence -- about the great problem that is before us. He said that the country needs a great deal from science. But he felt that science, to provide this, needs the President acutely. The Soviets are now in a pioneering stage and frame of mind. They regard science both as an essential tool and as a way of life. They are teaching their young people to enjoy science. Curiously, in the United States we are not now great builders for the future but are rather stressing production in great quantities of things we have already achieved. In Russia science is now being pursued both for enjoyment and for the strength of the country. He asked if there is not some way in which the President could inspire the country -- setting out our youth particularly on a whole variety of scientific adventures. If he were able to do that, there would be tremendous returns. At the present time scientists feel themselves isolated and alone, but all of this could change.

The President questioned the statement that the Russians attempt to inspire all of their people with science. He thought they had instead followed the practice of picking out the best minds and ruthlessly spurning the rest. At least he had been given that impression when he associated with them. As to Dr. Land's main point, however, he said he thought he could help and do part of the job. However, the need for a coordinated effort would still exist. In fact, he said he would like to try to create a spirit -- an attitude toward science similar to that held toward various kinds of athletics in his youth -- an attitude which now seemed to him to have palled somewhat. He would think that one speech would not do the job. There would be a need for great carry-through. He added that perhaps now is a good time to try such a thing. People are alarmed and thinking about science, and perhaps this alarm could be turned to a constructive result.

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Dr. Rabi said that many of the policy matters that come up to the President have a strong scientific component. He pointed out that the President lacks a scientific advisor, or someone who can provide him with a scientific point of view. The President said that it might be well to have such an advisor, or even a small section, to support him. He said the group would have to recognize, however, that every such individual added simply adds to the burdens of the Presidency -- but perhaps the individual could be a great help in getting the right point of view across. He said he would like to hear something more specific as to their ideas. Dr. Rabi said the first essential is to get someone whom the President can live with easily (in the sense of working with him agreeably); this individual should be completely sound scientifically as well. Dr. Killian added that a committee to back up the individual would also have great value, and the President agreed, using the analogy of the Council of Economic Advisors. The President said that such an individual could be most helpful. For example, he could keep a record of decisions and actions affecting scientific matters. He referred to his decision to give top priority to the development of operational ballistic missiles at the earliest possible date. Subsequently secondary considerations were introduced which tended to delay this overriding objective. One of the group suggested that the scientific advisor could help the President not to forget such policy decisions. The President interjected with vehemence that he had not forgotten this view but that those charged with the program had.

Dr. Killian said that these comments had great value in the long term for the creation of a more fertile climate for scientific activity. In the short term, there is missing a sense of urgency and mission in the scientific community. Certain subjects need to be attacked that are not now being investigated. He thought that if we continue to go as we are now the Russians will surpass us, and it will not take them long to do so. The question is how to get the research and development programs in Defense into focus. The need is more for leadership than for money. The President said he thought he had a fine man in Mr. McElroy. Already he has been impressed with McElroy's approach. He thought it might be well for the group to meet with McElroy. (At this point I left the meeting and called Secretary McElroy, and on rejoining the meeting arranged an appointment for the group with the Secretary at 1:30 this afternoon.)

As I returned Dr. Wiesner was telling the President that much of the problem relating to the timing on missiles and the satellite came from

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our late start on them -- rather than from delays in their conduct after they were initiated by this Administration. The President said he has avoided going into that matter because it becomes immediately political, and he just does not want to do that.

I left the meeting again for a moment in connection with the McElroy appointment. When I returned the group was discussing the need for scientific collaboration with our allies. The President said that much of the difficulty went back to 1945 and the Fuchs case. When this incident occurred, the Congress decided to bar all atomic information to the British. He asked General Cutler and me to see that a careful examination is made of authority under the law for exchange of scientists and scientific information, and analysis of what would have to be done to set up a joint committee. Dr. Rabi suggested the need for a scientific man in the State Department, but this was not discussed. Dr. Hill (and others) said that our security regulations cause a large part of the difficulty with our allies -- particularly in areas other than atomic. The President recalled how he has personally worked at this problem over a number of years.

In further discussion the President said that he would take the opportunity to speak out on the question of a proper attitude toward science (the Land suggestion), perhaps using his next press conference. He would bring out that our people should take an interest and a concern in science, and not just leave the matter to scientists. Some follow-up would be needed, however. On the point of adequate recognition of scientists, he recalled that he had tried to get Mrs. Hobby to set up a series of awards for distinction in science and the arts, something along the lines of the French Academy but of even higher standing. He indicated that success has not yet been achieved. He mentioned also his plan to visit the Redstone Arsenal and the missile firing center, and told how the problems of the Presidency affect such things, in that he had to cancel the visit because a trip by him to an Army post in the South at the present time would be harmful and misunderstood.

In concluding the meeting, the President asked me to have a check made into the restrictions that prevent exchange of information. He asked the group to include in the study for which they are to prepare terms of reference just what we have done in the area of science since 1945. As the group left the meeting, several of them came up to me to express their enthusiasm and appreciation for the session they had had with the President.

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