



## “A Paragraph on Nonproliferation”

**Date:** 1966-10-16  
**Conversation:** WH6610-05-10953  
**Participant:** Lyndon B. Johnson  
**Participant:** Robert S. McNamara  
**Start Time:** 19:03  
**Duration:** 03:02  
**Place:** Oval Office

SCENE SETTER: As part of U.S. efforts to promote arms control and disarmament, President Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert S. “Bob” McNamara reviewed language to restrict the spread of nuclear weapons. This drafting process would result in the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons, or Nonproliferation Treaty, signed by 36 countries in Moscow on 1 July 1968.

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**President Johnson:** Yes, Bob?

**Robert S. “Bob” McNamara:** I apologize for calling at this time, Mr. President, [*President Johnson acknowledges*] but yesterday, Dean [Rusk] and I mentioned a paragraph on nonproliferation to you. I’m not sure you had a chance to [*President Johnson snorts*] see it today. I thought if you did, you could let us—me know what you wanted—

**President Johnson:** All right. I thought he was going to write me. He told me he was preparing me a memo, and I never did see it, explaining it, going into it further, discussing it. That’s what Rusk said.

**McNamara:** Well, I . . . evidently he misunderstood, because I don’t think—

**President Johnson:** Uh-huh. All right.

**McNamara:** I don’t think he did. I’ll try to get something—

**President Johnson:** All right. I thought that that’s what he said. Now, if he doesn’t intend to send anything else, I’ll go back on this. I have it right in front of me.

**McNamara:** Yeah.

**President Johnson:** [*reading aloud*] “Each nuclear weapon state party to this treaty undertakes not to transfer nuclear weapons . . . or other nuclear explosives directly or indirectly to a nonnuclear weapon state . . .”

**McNamara:** “Or a group of states.”

**President Johnson:** “Either individually—”

**McNamara:** “Or—”

**President Johnson:** “—or by virtue of its membership in a military alliance or a group of states.”

**McNamara:** Right.

**President Johnson:** So—

**McNamara:** Now, that’s the key, Mr. President, and what that says to you is that this proposes we restrict transfer of ownership of the warhead itself.

**President Johnson:** Mm-hmm.

**McNamara:** And this would still allow us to say to the [West] Germans that “if you want to buy into some form of collective ownership of the launch vehicle, a missile or an airplane, you can do that, but you can’t buy into collective ownership of the warhead itself,” which, of course, they never could have anyhow, because we don’t have authority under the law to transfer ownership of the warhead. But—

**President Johnson:** No, but we hadn’t—didn’t MLF [Multilateral Force] contemplate that we would get an amendment there?

**McNamara:** No, sir. It didn’t.

**President Johnson:** It did not. All right. “Not—”

**McNamara:** Not with respect to ownership.

**President Johnson:** “Not to relinquish its control over its nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosives.” Well, that’s the law now. We can’t do that—

**McNamara:** That’s correct. That’s correct. Yeah.

**President Johnson:** “And not in any way to assist, encourage, or induce any nonnuclear weapon state to manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosives.”

**McNamara:** The key sentence in there, Mr. President, is that one you read at first, which says that you can’t transfer directly or indirectly to a single nation or, in effect, a group of nations, ownership in the warhead. Now, the—

**President Johnson:** What’ll the Germans say about that?

**McNamara:** The Germans will grumble about it. And I think there’s some in [Department of] State who oppose this. That particular language was drafted by Dean himself. [Robert R.] Bob Bowie, for example, I think, opposes it. Dean favors it. I favor it.

**President Johnson:** What will the Russians do with it?

**McNamara:** We're not sure they'll accept it. It is not the language that [Andrei] Gromyko proposed, but it—we think there's a reasonable chance they'll either accept this or suggest some relatively minor modification of it.

*End of excerpt.*

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