November 16, 1944.

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. MCLOUG, Assistant Secretary of War.

I have examined the proposed memorandums to the President transmitted with your memorandum to me of November 15 regarding war criminals and offer the following observations:

1. In paragraph 1 of the memorandums reference is made to statements dated October 9, 1942, December 17, 1942, and November 1943. If these statements are to be revised you will probably want to include the President's statement of March 20, 1944.

2. In the third paragraph of the memorandums it is stated that these pronouncements contemplate punishing not only technical violations of the laws and customs of war but also (1) atrocities committed by the Axis before there was a state of war and (2) atrocities committed by them against their own nationals on racial, religious and political grounds.

It will be noted that the various statements relied upon are in certain respects somewhat ambiguous. They could be interpreted as having been made in the memorandums, or they might be interpreted more broadly. This leads me to inquire whether we should interpret the statements for the President or whether we should ask him whether he intended that the statements should have the broad implication of which they seem to be susceptible and which they are receiving.

3. I am wondering whether the several statements regarding conspiracy give a clear indication of the nature of the crimes which it is proposed to bring. It is stated in the second paragraph on page 2 of the proposed memorandums that there has been a continuing conspiracy necessarily involving the commission of atrocities which the United States have pledged themselves to punish. It seems to me that the question is whether the conspiracy was to commit these crimes or whether it was a conspiracy for world domination as stated in the first paragraph on page 3 of the memorandums. In furtherance of or incidental to which these crimes were committed. A conspiracy for world domination could hardly be denounced as a crime.

4. In the

SECRET
November 16, 1944,

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. McGOVERN, Assistant Secretary of War,

I have examined the proposed memorandum to the President transmitted with your memorandum to me of November 14 regarding war crimes and offer the following observations:

1. In paragraph 1 of the memorandum reference is made to statements dated October 7, 1942, December 17, 1943, and November 1944. If these statements are to be listed you will probably want to include the President’s statement of March 24, 1944.

2. In the third paragraph of the memorandum it is stated that these pronouncements contemplate punishing not only technical violations of the laws and customs of war but also (1) atrocities committed by the Axis before there was a state of war and (2) atrocities committed by them against their own nationals on racial, religious, and political grounds. It will be noted that the various statements relied upon are in certain respects somewhat ambiguous. They could be interpreted as has been done in the memorandum, or they might be interpreted more broadly. This leads me to inquire whether we should interpret the statements for the President or whether we should ask him whether he intended that the statements should have the broad implication of which they seem to be susceptible and which they are receiving.

3. I am wondering whether the several statements regarding conspiracy give a clear indication of the nature of the charge which it is proposed to bring. It is stated in the second paragraph on page 2 of the proposed memorandum that there has been a continuing conspiracy necessarily involving the commission of atrocities which the United States have pledged themselves to punish. It seems to me that the question is whether the conspiracy was to commit these crimes or whether it was a conspiracy for world domination as stated in the first paragraph on page 3 of the memorandum. In furtherance of or incidental to which these crimes were committed. A conspiracy for world domination could hardly be denounced a crime.

4. In the
November 16, 1944.

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. KNOBLEY, Assistant Secretary of War.

I have examined the proposed memorandum to the President transmitted with your memorandum to me of November 15 regarding war crimes and offer the following observations:

1. In paragraph 1 of the memorandum reference is made to statements dated October 7, 1945, December 17, 1946, and December 1947. If these statements are to be listed you will probably want to include the President's statement of March 34, 1944.

2. In the third paragraph of the memorandum it is stated that "the pronouncements contemplate punishing not only technical violations of the laws and customs of war but also (1) atrocities committed by the Axis before there was a state of war and (2) atrocities committed by them against their own nationals on racial, religious and political grounds."

It will be noted that the various statements relied upon are in certain respects somewhat ambiguous. They could be interpreted as having been made in the memorandum, or they might be interpreted more broadly. This leads me to inquire whether you should interpret the statements for the President or whether you should ask him whether he intended that the statement should have the broad implication of which they seem to be susceptible and which they are receiving.

3. I am wondering whether the several statements regarding conspiracy give a clear indication of the nature of the charge which it is proposed to bring. It is stated in the second paragraph on page 3 of the proposed memorandum that there has been a continuing conspiracy necessarily involving the commission of the atrocities which the United Nations have pledged themselves to punish. It seems to me that the question is whether the conspiracy was to commit these crimes or whether it was a conspiracy for war crimes as stated in the first paragraph on page 3 of the memorandum. In furtherance of or incidental to which these crimes were committed. A conspiracy for war crimes could hardly be described as a crime.

4. In the
4. In the first full paragraph of the recommendations on page 4, a treaty is recommended under which a court would be established. Nothing is said about the fact that Britain does not favor the treaty process but would be agreeable to the establishment of mixed military tribunals for the handling of cases that cannot be tried in national courts. I think that the President would be interested in knowing the British attitude. I am also wondering whether it would be inconsistent with thinking in your Department to suggest the possibility, as an alternative to a treaty court, of a mixed military tribunal, the creation of which, as I understand the situation, would not require a treaty.

5. I also note the statement in the paragraph at the bottom of page 4 and the top of page 5, regarding the undesirability for the time being of publicity. I think that it should be borne in mind, however, that the chances for preventing publicity once steps to obtain a treaty are taken will be very small, however carefully we may proceed.

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The foregoing comments represent rough thoughts that have occurred to me. You may have already explored these points and have ready answers. I feel, however, that the proposed action would constitute a very important step which may have many ramifications and needs to be weighed most carefully.

Agreeably to your suggestion, I have sent a copy of this memorandum to Mr. Knox in the Navy Department.

Sincerely,

Green H. Backworth

Secret
4. In the first full paragraph of the recommendations on page 4, a treaty is recommended under which a court would be established. Nothing is said about the fact that Britain does favor the treaty process but would be agreeable to the establishment of mixed military tribunals for the handling of cases that can not be tried in national courts. I think that the President would be interested in moving the British attitude. I am also wondering whether it would be inconsistent with thinking in your Department to suggest the possibility, as an alternative to a treaty court, of a mixed military tribunal, the creation of which, as I understand the situation, would not require a treaty.

5. I also note the statements in the paragraph at the bottom of page 4 and the top of page 5, regarding the undesirability for the time being of publicity. I think that it would be borne in mind, however, that the chances for preventing publicity once steps to obtain a treaty are taken will be very small, however carefully we try to proceed.

The foregoing comments represent roughly thoughts that have occurred to me. You may have already explored these points and have partly covered, I feel, however, that the proposed action would constitute a very important step which may have many ramifications and needs to be weighed most carefully,

Agreeably to your suggestion, I have sent a copy of this memorandum to Mr. Face in the Navy Department.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]

[Redacted]
4. In the first full paragraph of the recommendations on page 4, a treaty is recommended under which a court would be established. Nothing is said about the fact that Britain does not favor the treaty process but would be agreeable to the establishment of mixed military tribunals for the handling of cases that can not be tried in national courts. I think that the President would be interested in moving the British attitude. I am also wondering whether it would be inconsistent with thinking in your Department to suggest the possibility, as an alternative to a treaty court, of a mixed military tribunal, the creation of which, as I understand the situation, would not require a treaty.

5. I also note the statements in the paragraph at the bottom of page 4 and the top of page 5, regarding the unsuitability for the time being of publicity. I think that it would be borne in mind, however, that the chances for preventing publicity once steps to obtain a treaty are taken will be very small, however carefully we may proceed.

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The foregoing comments represent roughly thoughts that have occurred to me. You may have already explored these points and have ready answers. I feel, however, that the proposed action would constitute a very important step which may have many ramifications and needs to be weighed most carefully.

Agreeably to your suggestion, I have sent a copy of this memorandum to Mr. Kiss in the Navy Department.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

[Official Position]