

July 29, 1971

**Letter from Melvin R. Laird to Henry A. Kissinger,
'Summary of Agreement for US Assistance to French
Missile Program'**

Citation:

"Letter from Melvin R. Laird to Henry A. Kissinger, 'Summary of Agreement for US Assistance to French Missile Program'", July 29, 1971, Wilson Center Digital Archive, FOIA Release. Obtained and contributed by William Burr and included in NPIHP Research Update #2. <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/112255>

Summary:

Report on a meeting between US nuclear personnel and a French delegation in Paris. Ground rules were drawn for future US ballistic missile assistance. The French also gave a detailed technical overview of their missile program. Attached to the letter are the agreed ground rules, "Understanding Between U.S. and France Concerning the Substance and Procedures of Ballistic Missile Cooperation Paper."

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

Handwritten: Kennedy FYI
29 JUL 1971
Vertical: 10/10/71
U.S.S.M. - France

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger
Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Henry:

This is in reply to your memo of June 29 to Dave Packard. In accord with previous arrangements and agreements (described in his memorandum to you of 25 May 1971), a U.S. team met with a French delegation in Paris, June 14-17. The purpose of the meeting was to work out a provisional set of mutually agreeable ground rules, covering conduct of the missile cooperation program (these ground rules being subject to subsequent review and approval at higher levels within each government), and to obtain a more detailed understanding of French missile problems so that effort to implement the program of assistance could be initiated.

The U.S. delegation was led by a member of Dr. Foster's staff (Mr. G. R. Barse), who has been designated U.S. single-point-of-contact for this program, and included Mr. R. Bartholomew, ISA, and Air Force and Navy representatives. They met with Ingenieur General M. Brunet (director of French missile programs), the French single-point-of-contact, together with other French participants, the makeup varying with the problem under discussion.

The U.S. tabled a proposed set of ground rules which I had approved and which also had been coordinated with State and your staff. The French delegation was pleased with the proposed rules and accepted them in their entirety, suggesting only the addition of two statements regarding procedures -- one to increase the flexibility of operation and one to provide for regular meetings of the two points of contact. Attached is a copy of the rules, with the additions proposed by the French underlined. The changes are acceptable to us and to State. It was agreed that formal adoption of the ground rules would be effected, after

Declassified/Released on 12-1-95
under provisions of E.O. 12958
by J. Saunders, National Security Council

EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC
REGRADING: DOD DIR 5200.10
DOES NOT APPLY

UNCLASSIFIED
TOP SECRET SENSITIVE

COPY 1 OF 12 COPIES

Sec Def Cont Nr. X- 3404

Handwritten: 32

each government's internal review, by signature of Dr. Foster and M. Blancard on an appropriate document. We intend, after receiving informal confirmation of French agreement, to implement this formal adoption.

The French were very forthcoming in the technical discussions. They described their land and sea-based systems generally, so as to place matters in context, and went into greater detail on specific problem areas. They took the U.S. delegation to Bordeaux to tour propulsion fabrication and missile assembly facilities. Actual missiles were examined at close hand.

The quality of their work was impressive, as was the caliber of the personnel involved. Questions were answered freely, with evident knowledge of what they are doing. It would seem appropriate to repeat what was stated in NSSM 100 -- that the French will likely achieve their goals with or without U.S. help, but that they will do so sooner and at lower cost with U.S. help than without it. I might note that the help they are asking from us seems relatively small in contrast to what they have achieved already on their own.

They are by no means asking us to help develop missile systems. This they already have done themselves. Rather, they are asking us to give them the benefit of our experience in solving some detailed -- although not apparently catastrophic -- problems, to save the time and money involved in solving them on their own, and to help them establish realistic reliability, quality control and maintenance programs -- all for their existing systems. Problem areas raised to date include propulsion (bonding, and separation problems), stress corrosion of nitrogen storage tanks used in thrust vector control systems, gas bearing gyro life, electrical connectors, hydraulic accumulators, missile pyrotechnic safety measures aboard submarines, and simulation techniques for use in RV hardening programs. In general, the questions they are asking us seem to be ones on which we can assist in a substantive manner without compromise of our own weapon systems or principles. Incidentally, in order not to make it appear one-sided, our approach in the meeting was, whenever appropriate, on issues raised by the French, to comment on how the U.S. approached similar problems. (Examples: U.S. approach to insuring electrical

~~TOP SECRET~~ UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

connector integrity; U.S. approach to preventing premature ignition of missile rocket motors aboard the submarine; U.S. approach to routine surveillance.)

It was understood, of course, that we intended to make more substantive comment on questions raised than could be made at the meeting. As established by the ground rules, the French will pass to us, through the two single-points-of-contact, written summaries of problems and questions being asked. Action has been initiated on the first several writeups (passed to us at the Paris meeting). More will follow soon.

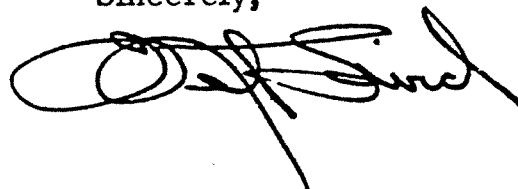
You will be interested in the attached letter which Dr. Foster received from M. Blancard. It indicates satisfaction with the Paris meeting and notes the status of ground rule review in France.

The attitude of the French was quite constructive and friendly throughout the meetings. They obviously very much appreciate our decision to help, and feel that we can provide them valuable assistance. I believe that if we make a sincere and earnest effort at providing substantive answers to French requests, within the limits of NSDM guidance, we will further the President's objective of improving relations with France. Conversely, if we make only a superficial effort, it could well have the opposite effect. It is my intent to insure that our approach is the former.

A return meeting has been scheduled for early October, in Paris, for initial U.S. response to questions raised.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Bill Rogers.

Sincerely,



Attachments - 2

TOP SECRET UNCLASSIFIED SENSITIVE

Understanding Between the U.S. and France Concerning the Substance and Procedures of Ballistic Missile Cooperation

I. Substance

A. U.S. missile cooperation with France shall be directed toward the objective of helping to improve the operability and reliability of existing French systems. It may include assistance of either a design or production nature, related to the solution of specific technical problems or to more general problems of a programmatic nature. U.S. assistance will be in response to French requests. It is understood that such requests will not be directed toward helping to develop next generation systems with significantly improved functional characteristics (e.g., in accuracy, range, re-entry vehicles, etc.). At the same time it is recognized that the effort envisioned hereunder could result in some French redesign of existing systems.

B. There will be limitations the U.S. must observe which will constrain the extent of assistance in the areas of guidance, accuracy, and nuclear hardening. This is not intended to imply that these areas are excluded, but rather to say that they are particularly sensitive and therefore, as stated, subject to particular limitations.

C. The fact and substance of this cooperation is considered to be of great sensitivity. It is understood that these discussions will consequently be placed on a close-hold, highly classified basis in both governments, with access and knowledge limited strictly to those whose official duties

require such knowledge or access.

D. Each side agrees that the information received from the other party hereunder will not be divulged to any other government or organization.

II. Procedures

A. U.S. assistance will be in response to specific French requests on a case by case basis.

B. A single point of contact will be established on the part of each government, to serve as a focal point to coordinate and control the overall program, funnel the various questions and problems to the proper organizations and control and monitor the exchanges which occur. The U.S. point of contact is the Deputy Assistant Director for Strategic Weapons, Office of the Director of Defense Research and Engineering. The French point of contact is (Directeur Technique Des Engins Delegation Ministerielle Des Armaments).

C. It is agreed that the French authorities shall describe their overall system in sufficient detail that the U.S. can appreciate the context of the problems. The specific problems to be discussed shall be described in as precise terms as possible, with supporting written documentation, evidence, data, drawings, etc., necessary to make clear the nature of the problem, the circumstances under which it occurs and possible causative factors.

D. The U.S. will examine the written material describing the problem

and, in light of its own experience, formulate written suggestions for possible means of solution. After a suitable period for French review of the written response, an appropriate delegation from the U.S. can meet with the French to interpret any points which are not clear, and to answer questions and define required follow-up. In order to establish and clarify the written requests which are to be addressed, as a general rule this written procedure will be preceded by a direct exchange between French and U.S. delegations under the authority of the two points of contact cited in paragraph II. B. No subject shall be discussed without prior agreement of the two points of contact concerning the nature and extent of the exchanges.

E. It is anticipated that, as matters proceed, it may be mutually agreed to alter these procedures in order to increase flexibility.

F. The two points of contact will meet on a regular basis, at not greater than six months' intervals, to review the status of the cooperation program including the progress of actions in process, and to review proposals for further action.