

May 3, 1972

Memorandum from Holsey G. Handyside, 'Status Report on Proposed Nuclear Safety Talks with the French'

Citation:

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Summary:

Holsey G. Handyside reports on a meeting with Christopher J. Makins, First Secretary of the British Embassy. Handyside informs Makins that organizational meetings for the US-French nuclear safety talks were planned for May 4-5. The talks will not include any Restricted Data that the French do not already have. Handyside reiterates that the French are not aware that the British have been informed of the exchange. He also asked Makins for his opinion on why the British government has repeatedly asked for status updates about the talks.

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

LIMITED DISTRIBUTION

DATE: May 3, 1972
Place: Dept of State

SUBJECT: Status Report on Proposed Nuclear Safety Talks with the French

PARTICIPANTS: Christopher J. Makins, First Secretary, British Embassy
Holsey G. Handyside, Director, PM/AE

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SUMMARY: Following the practice established in April 1971 in response to Mr. Kissinger's instructions, State informed the British May 3 that the US expected to hold the initial, organizational round of the projected US-French nuclear safety talks on May 4 and 5.

In response to my earlier telephone request, Mr. Makins came into the Department mid-afternoon May 3. Launching immediately into the topic, I recalled that I had previously assured Mr. Makins, in response to his several requests, that the USG would pass along a progress report on our projected nuclear safety talks with the French to HMG as soon as there was something appropriate to relay. Recollecting that I had told him during our exchange the preceding week that the logistical details of a first meeting still had not been worked out, I reported that the pieces of the puzzle had now fallen into place. As a result, I had called him in to inform him that the organizing round of the projected nuclear safety talks with the French was scheduled to be held in Washington on May 4 and 5. I stated that the purpose of the organizing round

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PM/AE:HGHandyside:bpw

(Drafting Office and Officer)

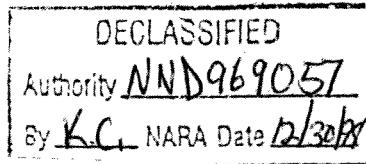
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was: to reach agreement on the ground rules governing the follow-on substantive round; to reach a consensus on the agenda for the substantive round; and to set the time and place for the substantive session.

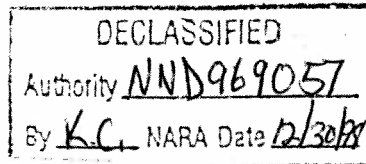
Then, declaring that I wished to recall two points that had previously been made to Mr. Makins and his colleagues here and in London for the purpose of emphasizing them, I reiterated that the material to be covered in the projected talks with the French is non-sensitive information. I stated that there will be no Restricted Data discussed or passed to the French, with the possible exception of passing references for illustrative purposes to RD information which was given to the French in the early 1960's when they were still full participants in NATO military affairs. Second, I underscored again the extreme sensitivity of all information about the projected safety talks. I observed that the general sensitivity of the topic involved and of the upcoming talks themselves is self-evident. But, I suggested to Mr. Makins, the fact that the French do not know that the US is keeping HMG generally posted on this project is perhaps of even greater importance. I pointed out that any slip could prove to be very embarrassing for all three Governments, and declared that the USG was therefore relying on HMG's utmost discretion to hold the information very closely and to conceal its knowledge of the talks from the French.

In response, Mr. Makins agreed that both observations warranted reiteration, and indicated that he would make a point of underscoring the necessity for absolute discretion in his report of our conversation to London.

Shifting the conversation from an official exchange to a more personal discussion, I told Makins that one aspect of the US-UK exchanges on the projected safety talks puzzled me, and indicated I would like to pose a personal question aimed at furthering my own understanding of the problem. I noted that following the initial briefing of the Foreign Office by Embassy London, HMG representatives had made a series of inquiries about the status of the projected talks -- two high level inquiries in London, two here, and four mid-level approaches in Washington. I told Makins I would be most grateful for any light he might be able to shed on the reasons underlying HMG's intense interest in a project that the USG was handling calmly and routinely despite its very great inherent significance.

Responding in an equally personal vein, Makins reported that the instructions received by the British Embassy in Washington had not contained any hint of Whitehall's reasoning, but he suggested

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two explanations for HMG's interest. He suggested, first, that HMG officials concerned with nuclear matters were probably seeking to assure themselves that there was no more to the Franco-American project than meets the eye. He commented that he could understand how their concern could easily have been intensified by the periodic reports they received from the US over a period of several months that there had been no forward motion. He suggested, secondly, that HMG would understandably consider any movement on the US-French nuclear front to be of great importance since it might well develop into a situation that could make tripartite cooperation in the nuclear field possible or alternatively could permit some degree of Anglo-French nuclear cooperation. He observed that the prospect of any type of cooperation in the nuclear area is of special significance at this particular time in view of the intensive re-assessment HMG is currently carrying out of its own nuclear deterrent.

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