

**February 18, 1970**  
**Memorandum from Helmut Sonnenfeldt to Henry A.  
Kissinger, 'French-US Military Relations'**

**Citation:**

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**Summary:**

Kissinger briefs the president before his visit with Pompidou stating why the French may want a military alliance, as well as the problems associated with such an alliance due to the French attitude regarding NATO and nuclear forces. He then states the reasons why the U.S. should encourage French entry into the NPG and issues concerning joint targeting with the French. He further discusses issues of French/U.S. and French/British alliances that would be of possible interest of discussion when Pompidou visits the U.S. soon.

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ACTION  
February 18, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. KISSINGER

FROM: Helmut Sonnenfeldt

SUBJECT: French-US Military Issues

Attached in lieu of an oral discussion in the NSC is a briefing paper for the President, discussing US-French military issues. This is distilled from the Review Group paper. I thought you might wish to send it to the President ahead of the final briefing package. Alternatively, it could be attached to the briefing package as a Tab.

RECOMMENDATION

That you sign the memo to the President at Tab A.

HS:mm

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E.O. 12958, as amended, Sect 3.5  
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## MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: Military Issues in Our Relations with France

The NSC Review Group recently considered a study of various possible forms of US and NATO military cooperation with France. An issues paper has been prepared reflecting agency views.

According to recent indications, President Pompidou does not himself plan to take the initiative in raising any of the military issues. But it is clear that he will be ready to express himself generally on them if you should raise them. Indeed, Pompidou has already alluded to some of them in his recent New York Times interview.

This memorandum is intended to place before you the major substantive issues in this area together with a brief discussion of the principal factors involved in each. It is unlikely, regardless of how one or more of these might arise in your talks with Pompidou, that you could expect to do more than have a general discussion with him and get a rough feel of his attitude. In the light of such a general discussion, it will then be possible to refine the issues and determine how, if at all, they should be followed up.

There are two basic aspects to the French attitude which limit any military arrangements with them, either by ourselves or by NATO.

-- The French will under no circumstances re-enter the NATO military organization or in any way integrate their forces with those of other countries;

-- the French insist that their nuclear forces must remain solely under their own control.

We, in turn, cannot under existing laws and treaties assign

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and cannot directly assist the French in the development of nuclear weapons.

The various possible types of cooperation discussed below fall well short of these limitations on both the French and us.

The Major Issues:

French nuclear forces are growing, though not as rapidly as General de Gaulle once hoped. [REDACTED]

Though not a formidable force in US or Soviet terms, the French will nevertheless have the capability of triggering a nuclear exchange in Europe of some consequence for the USSR.

This raises the question of whether we can and should move toward closer planning and coordination of French forces either with NATO, or with the US bilaterally.

A. French Association with the NATO Nuclear Planning Group (NPG)

This group evolved after French withdrawal. Its line of authority runs back to the NATO Defense Policy Committee of which France is not a member, but there is in the NPG an "empty chair for France." The French may have reservations about membership on the grounds that this would be tantamount to integrated defense. We have learned, however, that the French may now be interested in some form of participation or membership.

Issue: Is it in our interest to encourage French association with NPG?

- The consensus in the Government is that we would benefit from French participation provided we do not have to make any concessions on the constitutional lines of authority for the Group.
- French association would provide a forum for discussing strategic doctrine and related matters.
- It could be an opening wedge for greater coordination of targeting of nuclear forces.

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- It could ultimately be the bridge for discussion between the British and French on nuclear collaboration.
- On the other hand, French strategic thinking will lend weight to those Europeans in the NPG and NATO who favor earlier resort to nuclear weapons; this complicates our efforts to maintain a flexible policy on the first use of tactical nuclear weapons.
- Though Pompidou may not be ready to make any commitments it would seem in our interest to indicate at least for the record that we do not oppose French membership, nor do we attach any strings or conditions if they should decide to play a role in the NPG.
- While most Allies would probably favor French association with the NPG, several of them might set pre-conditions.

#### B. Coordination of Strategic Targeting

There is no coordination between General Goodpaster's Nuclear Strike Plan for NATO and the French strategic forces. The French have never ruled this out completely, but have generally claimed that it would be premature in view of the small size of the French force. In his New York Times interview, Pompidou said coordination with SAC might be "feasible."

Issue: Whether to press for discussion on joint targeting, and if so, whether to restrict this to the SACEUR channel, or accept some variation in which SACEUR would be associated but not necessarily a direct participant.

- The practical consequence of even a broad agreement on joint targeting is much the same as if French forces were formally committed to NATO; it presumes some consensus on doctrine, and sets certain limits on freedom of action. This way in the end deter the French from accepting the idea.
- It might seem to some NATO members an undue reward for French refusal to enter into formal commitments.

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There is general agreement in the government that the preferable means of accomplishing joint targeting is through General Goodpaster in his capacity as SACEUR.

Less desirable would be trilateral conversations between the UK, the French, and the US, with SACEUR as a participant.

Least desirable, but perhaps not unacceptable, would be joint bilateral discussions, with SACEUR informed through liaison.

In general there seems to be no strong disadvantage in mentioning this to President Pompidou as an example of practical consultation which we would consider a healthy step forward.

C. [REDACTED]

Since the French withdrawal from NATO commands, our agreement has lapsed to [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] There was, however, an understanding between General Lemnitzer and former French Chief of Staff Ailleret that in time of war, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] In late 1968 the French raised the question whether some arrangement was possible for the [REDACTED]

Thus far we have not taken a position.

The issue may become academic if the French complete the [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] This would mean the French would have the capability to initiate a tactical nuclear exchange -- despite the careful plans we are developing in the NPG.

Resumption of direct US support in the old form, however, would probably require approval of the Congress, since Congressional endorsement of the earlier agreement was obtained on the understanding that [REDACTED]

State, with Defense concurrence, believes that if this matter arises you should indicate the difficulties we would have in legal restrictions, but that you would not object to an exploration of the subject with the French, our Allies, SACEUR and the Congress.

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D. Our Use of French Facilities

At the time of the French withdrawal, we negotiated over the possible use of French territory for certain emergencies. We pressed, however, for automatic re-entry rights; the French refused.

Defense believes we should reopen the question on a contingency basis, not pressing for any automatic rights, but only for planning purposes.

This issue might still be rather sensitive in France. It is, however, an example of the kind of practical cooperation we could discuss with the French without having to press for reintegration.

E. UK-French Collaboration

This is a longer-term issue. Neither the British nor the French seem inclined to raise it yet, either with us or with each other. It is, of course, a major question and both are keenly aware of its possible ramifications. Some observers feel that British entry into the Common Market is tied to future collaboration with the French on nuclear weaponry.

We have not examined this issue in depth from a military technical standpoint or from the strategic political aspect.

There is no pressure within the government to move ahead on this issue, and many feel that it would be quite premature for us to broach it with the French.

Nevertheless, should the question arise, there seems to be a consensus that we should indicate that we are not opposed in principle.

We are obligated, however, to discuss the issue with the British if the French raise it.

CONCLUSIONS

Each of the foregoing issues is suitable for general discussion with Pompidou, whether or not he elects to raise them himself.

The NATO-related issues (notably the question of French membership in or association with the Nuclear Planning Group) cannot of course be settled bilaterally between us and the French.

Talking Points for your use will be included in your briefing materials for your talks with Pompidou.

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