

April 16, 1970

Memorandum from Helmut Sonnenfeldt to Henry A. Kissinger, 'Assistance to the French Ballistic Missile Program'

Citation:

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Summary:

Sonnenfeldt summarizes a memorandum from Secretary of Defense Laird. He lists the specific information requests the French have made, and expresses concerns about their requests for star-tracker navigation equipment and US contractor support. He recommends an exploratory meeting between John Foster and Jean Blancard, the French Ministerial Delegate for Armaments.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

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Authority E 012958
By CMP NARA Date 12/4/07

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THE WHITE HOUSE

~~SECRET/NODIS/SENSITIVE~~

WASHINGTON

ACTION

April 16, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. KISSINGER

FROM: Helmut Sonnenfeldt

SUBJECT: Assistance to the French Ballistic Missile Program

*Rede memo.
But let us get this
thing moving
+ not bogged down. Think
Foster can
have my best
talk before
Laird + get
together.
H*

Secretary Laird has sent you a proposed memorandum to the President (Tab B) as you requested (Tab C) suggesting how he would handle assistance to the French missile program, and indicating he would be happy to join in a meeting of senior officials as you suggested to review a proposed course of action.

The Secretary's memo makes the following points.

French Requests

There are two different French requests for information that have not been dealt with.

1. A request (made in 1968 and 1969) to the Air Force for information on the Minuteman system: generally covering such subjects as maintenance, overhaul procedures, collection of technical data on reliability of subsystems, and several questions relating to testing procedures.

2. A second list given directly to John Foster indicated four areas of interest in information: (1) missile reliability, (2) star-tracker navigation equipment, (3) re-entry vehicle materials, and (4) possible US contract or support on development and production of boosters.

Possible Responses

In general the Secretary believes we will require some exploratory discussion with the French to clarify exactly what is desired and then determine to what extent we can satisfy the French and the best way to do so.

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 12958, as amended, Sect 3.5
NLN 99-12/5 per sec 3.3(b)(1)(c)(4) 5/31/06
By KW Date 3-28-07 [20 pages]

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- 2 -

He would start with the questions relating to Minuteman, which is probably the least sensitive. He feels that two of the questions addressed to Foster--on reliability and re-entry materials--could be handled without major problems.

On the other two questions -- star tracker navigation and US contractor support, he sees potential problems: the star tracker material implies counterforce capabilities, and US contractor involvement would mean semi-public support for the French program. Congressional reaction, as well as international ramification, such as the effect on SALT, would have to be considered.

The Secretary recommends that the initial exploratory contacts be kept in the channel of Foster and French Armament's Minister Blancard. After exploratory talks at this level, some follow-up meetings could be arranged at a lower level. Once we have a better understanding of the French request, we would then decide the extent and means of reply.

In view of the highly sensitive nature of the project he would keep it separate from the Franco-American Research and Development Steering Group (which is the subject of a separate memo). This makes a great deal of sense.

Quid Pro Quo

The Secretary's memo raises the question of whether we want a quid pro quo. There is not much we could gain in the technical field; a political return could be considered, but he makes no recommendation nor discusses what we really want, if anything.

SANITIZED p1 33(6)(4)

Comments and Next Steps

The outlined procedures and subject matter for initial talks seem quite sensible, provided you are satisfied that we know where we are going. An early contact between Foster and Blancard would impress the French with our willingness to consider at least some of their requests. This

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- 3 -

would keep the channel restricted at the outset, and allow for explorations of how far the French want to go.

What we can actually tell them is, of course, a very technical problem, and I think it would be prudent to hold one meeting quite soon with Laird, and with Foster attending, to explain to you how they would handle the exchange of information.

Since the President has approved the general idea of assisting the French, a memorandum for him should await a meeting with Laird.

At such a meeting, you may want to discuss not only the course of action which Secretary Laird has outlined (in response to your directive of March 16, 1970), but also the longer-range objectives we are trying to accomplish. These related not only to US-French relations, but to US-French-British relations, French-NATO relations and to our basic attitude regarding third-country strategic delivery capabilities.

Thus, a memo to the President would, even though the President has already made a decision, put the more immediate moves into a broader context (including, incidentally, also what General Goodpaster is doing.)

I cannot judge how anxious the President is to move ahead on this. If he desires an early first move, Foster could probably proceed with exploration with Blancard fairly soon, as Secretary Laird suggests. The more basic look at objectives and implications could still go forward at the same time.

The first step, in any event, would appear to be a meeting with Laird and Foster. In that connection, you need to decide whether, and at what level, to bring in State and CIA.

A memo to Secretary Laird is attached if you wish to send one. Otherwise you may want to handle the matter of a meeting by phone.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That you schedule a meeting with Secretary Laird and John Foster.

Approve He; Date _____ Disapprove _____

2. That you consider whether State and CIA should be included in a meeting.

State _____ CIA _____ Neither

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- 4 -

3. That, if you wish, you send the attached memorandum (Tab A) to the Secretary, concurring in his general approach.

4. That you wait until after the meeting with Laird and Foster before advising the President.

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Enclosure 12/4/07

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Authority <i>E 012958</i>
By <i>CMR</i> NARA Date <i>12/4/07</i>

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM FOR

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: Assistance to the French Ballistic Missile Program

Your memorandum on assistance to the French ballistic missile program seems a sound basis for approaching this problem. A meeting with you and Mr. Foster would be very helpful. We could go over the points that Mr. Foster could raise with Mr. Blancard and perhaps also consider the broader question of our longer-term objectives.

~~I thought we might want to advise the President until we have talked~~

I will contact you to arrange for our meeting.


Henry A. Kissinger

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[Handwritten note: ENCL 95-12/10 p 4/12/07]

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By SR NARA Date 7-12-99

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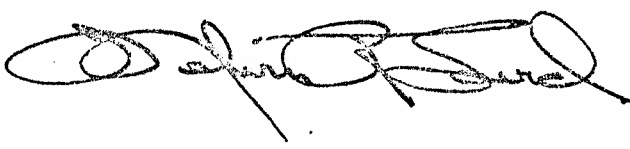
THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

2 APR 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: Assistant to the President for National Security
Affairs

SUBJECT: Memorandum for the President Regarding Assistance to
the French Ballistic Missile Programs.

In accordance with your memorandum request of March 16,
I am transmitting herewith my proposed memorandum to the President
on assistance to the French ballistic missile programs. I would
be happy to join a small meeting of senior officials, as you sug-
gested, to review the proposed courses of action prior to submittal
of the Memorandum to the President.



Attachment

SECRET SENSITIVE

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
 WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

SECRET/NODIS/SENSITIVE

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Possible Assistance to French Ballistic Missile Program

There has been recent correspondence between Dr. Kissinger and Dave Packard on the subject of French requests for assistance in their ballistic missile programs.

Dr. Kissinger requested that we prepare for you a memorandum indicating the nature of pending French requests and possible courses of action for dealing with them.

Nature of Requests

I have attached hereto a copy of our 20 February report to Dr. Kissinger, which provides a resume of the French missile program and the requests for assistance which we have received.

In brief, there appear to be only two items which qualify specifically as pending French requests. These are:

- (a) The set of questions regarding the Minuteman missile, given to the Air Force in October, 1969. These are included in attachment 1 hereto and, in nature, seek information relative to maintenance, test, inspection and quality control procedures as employed in our Minuteman program. They do not appear to request information on design details of the missile system, per se.
- (b) The request passed to Dr. Foster through the French Embassy in December 1969, citing four specific areas of interest:
 1. Reliability -- what they can expect to achieve, component by component through development.
 2. Star-tracker navigation equipment -- information on technology.
 3. Re-entry vehicle materials.
 4. Possibility of U.S. contractor support on the development and early production of boosters (rocket engines).

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Aside from the above, the Navy reports there have been periodic informal contacts which convey the impression the French would welcome some help in their sea-based missile program as well. There have been no formal requests or lists of questions, however, so it cannot be said that we have French requests pending in this particular area. Navy opinion tends to be, however, that should we open assistance channels in the ballistic missile area, requests for assistance in their sea-based program would be forthcoming. now
M

Possible Courses of Action

As is noted in Attachment 1, NSAM 294 effectively has prevented any positive response in the past to inquiries of the sort noted above. Should this be set aside, however, and you wish to adopt a positive attitude of cooperation (as Dr. Kissinger indicates to be the case) there would appear to be a rather convenient point of departure -- one which seems to be a major point of French interest and, at the same time, can be a relatively cautious opening for the U.S., in that it probably can be handled without infringing significantly on areas affecting national security or divulging critical or sensitive classified information on missile technology. I refer to the questions on Minuteman.

I believe the questions passed to Dr. Foster, bearing on reliability and re-entry vehicle materials, can be treated in much the same way from the U.S. standpoint.

The other two questions asked of Dr. Foster -- one on star-tracker equipment and one on U.S. contractor support on boosters -- require closer scrutiny. The star-tracker matter has counterforce implications, while contractor assistance on boosters connotes a rather close link between the U.S. and the French missile program. Both matters are apt to result in unfavorable reaction in Congress as well as in international politics, including a possible effect on SALT. Thus, while I am not suggesting at this time an outright rejection of these matters, I do suggest they require further investigation and consideration before any commitment be made thereon.

For that matter, each subject -- including the Minuteman questions -- requires further discussion to clarify exactly what is desired and then to determine the best method, and extent, by which we satisfy it.

This brings up the subject of procedure. It would seem appropriate to pursue initial exploratory contacts at the Dr. Foster-M. Blancard level, at which time agreements could be made for follow-up meetings at a lower level, participated in by technical representatives from the U.S. and France. These follow-up meetings would be conducted on the basis of our

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gaining a thorough understanding of the nature and extent of the French questions and problems but with the understanding that no answers would be provided at the time. Following this, having gotten a better understanding of what is being asked, we can work out the extent and means for reply. Probably initially our reply would want to be in the form of a written paper which can be coordinated thoroughly with all interested parties. Dependent upon the manner in which things develop, subsequent exchanges could become less formal and with a shorter time lag between question and answer. M

As indicated above, I suggest the set of Minuteman questions be used as the subject upon which to open discussion.

A further matter of procedure might be raised. This has to do with whether this subject be held within, or separate from, the U.S.-French Cooperation R&D Steering Committee which you wish to have activated at an early date. Because of its generally sensitive nature, I suggest it be kept separate, at least initially, from the Steering Committee.

Quid Pro Quo

I assume that you would expect an undertaking such as under discussion here to be one of mutual benefit -- not a unilateral transfer of assistance to the French from us.

From the standpoint of the U.S., it would appear we could seek either political or technical ends, or perhaps both, in exchange. A possible area for political consideration might be French participation in NATO defense studies. In this connection, however, I should note that there already has been an indication of a positive attitude by the French. In the opening discussions within the North Atlantic Council concerning the NATO study of Alliance Defense Problems in the Seventies, the French PermRep said that the French attitude about the proposed study was one of positive interest. From a technical standpoint, I should also note that we do not consider fruitful an exchange of U.S. ballistic missile information for French ballistic missile information. There appear to be areas in nonballistic missile technology which may be of sufficient interest to the Air Force and Army as to be considered a mutually beneficial technical exchange. These have not yet been clearly established, however. The Navy does not consider such to be the case. They are able to identify no technical areas of interest where they are not already receiving satisfactory information flow by exchanges in nonballistic missile areas.

Should you desire that the exchange be on a mutual technical basis, we will pursue the matter further and identify suitable areas of interest. Should you wish political exchange instead, we will go no further towards identifying such areas.

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Areas of Possible Concern

It might be well to cite several areas of concern.

First, regarding information release, per se. We have been careful in our dealings with the UK not to release information which could be used to develop a counter to our weapons, or information bearing upon the nature and levels of vulnerability -- particularly vulnerability to nuclear effects -- as well as information on advanced technology. I would suggest we adopt a similar approach in this matter, and that we go even further and restrict -- again, at least initially -- the technological information flow in such manner as not to provide any significant technical impetus to French capabilities or release any design or manufacturing information which could be considered sensitive. Sensitive in this sense connotes U.S. information which, if released, could bring another party up to U.S. state-of-art in areas where we believe we enjoy a technological advantage, and where such technological advantage is a significant factor in our relative weapons capability or posture. Of necessity, the delineation of such sensitive areas is a matter of considered technical judgment.

Another point which I suggest be considered is the impact upon SALT. I do not propose to discuss it further here, but mention it because I believe that moving toward cooperation with the French in the missile field could easily have an effect on SALT, particularly given the interest expressed by the Soviets at Helsinki in limiting strategic transfers to third parties.

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