



**July 11, 1972**  
**Memorandum for the Record from Helmut Sonnenfeldt,**  
**'Meeting Between French Minister of Defense Michel**  
**Debré and Dr. Kissinger, July 7, 1972'**

**Citation:**

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**Summary:**

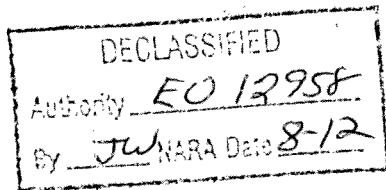
Summary of Kissinger and French Minister of Defense Debré's meeting on July 7, 1972. They first discussed US-French nuclear cooperation and the recent US technical assistance to the French ballistic missile program. Debré requested information about Soviet missile defenses. The remainder of the conversation was about Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR) and related nuclear security issues.

**Original Language:**

English

**Contents:**

- Scan of Original Document



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INFORMATION  
July 11, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Meeting Between French Minister of Defense Michel Debre and Dr. Kissinger, Friday, July 7, 1972, 9:50 a. m. at the Western White House. (Also present were French Ambassador Jacques Kosciusko-Morizet, Political Advisor to Minister Debre, Serge Boidevaix, and Helmut Sonnenfeldt.

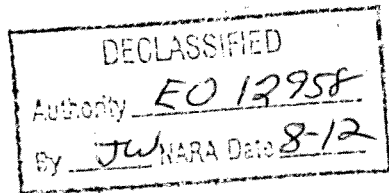
The conversation began ten minutes early. Debre spoke principally in French, Dr. Kissinger in English.

Debre started off by recalling that he had talked with Dr. Kissinger at the French Embassy in Washington some years ago. At that time Dr. Kissinger had influenced US history, now it had become world history. Dr. Kissinger said it was easier to start something than to finish it.

Debre then referred to Dr. Kissinger's numerous trips to Paris for the Vietnam negotiations. Dr. Kissinger thanked him for all his assistance and for the discretion with which the French had been handling the trips. Dr. Kissinger said that it would be impossible to keep these trips secret in the future for any length of time. Debre said that they were still only known by very few people on the French side when they took place, and Dr. Kissinger again expressed his appreciation for the French support.

Debre then said he had two main things on his mind, one a source of satisfaction the other of preoccupation. With respect to the first he was referring to the French-US talks, conducted principally by Messrs. Foster and Blancard on three technical subjects. These talks had been very satisfactory. Dr. Kissinger said this was our impression too. Moreover, he wanted to stress how impressed our people had been with the technical competence of their French counterparts. Originally the opinion of our people regarding French sophistication had not been very high, but what they found had really been a surprise. Debre went on to say that the atmosphere had been good and there had been great frankness. He was particularly pleased with the talks on nuclear safety. These would continue; in fact Blancard was coming over the following Sunday.

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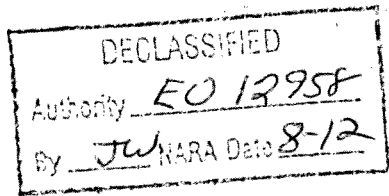
Debre then said he had an additional request to make. It related to Soviet missile defenses, their location and capabilities. The French did not know the subject well and felt they needed more information regarding Soviet radars and ABMs. Debre said the French had not yet broached the subject with the US since it seemed to be a little outside the scope of the technical talks so far under way. Dr. Kissinger asked whether the French wanted to raise this in an official way. Debre said that he first wanted to ask Dr. Kissinger since the subject was not in the technical program. Dr. Kissinger said there were two questions: do we want to do it, and if so how? In general, the White House was sympathetic but he would have to think about how to do it. Quite frankly our bureaucracy would be concerned about French security and about the French consultative arrangements with the Soviets. He wanted to be honest with Debre. Then there was the normal reluctance of intelligence organizations to share information. Dr. Kissinger repeated that in principle his reaction was positive but he would have to talk with the President.

Debre said he next wanted to share his preoccupation -- MBFR. His first question was what, practically, is involved? Secondly, he has sensed for over a year the feeling among Europeans that all US forces were going. He had seen Defense Ministers all over Europe. Nolens, volens, this will bring reductions everywhere. Dr. Kissinger asked if this was true of the FRG. Debre said that the FRG was a special problem. In any case, defense budgets everywhere were under the pressure of personnel cuts. And there was a drop in this "spirit of defense" which MBFR merely reinforced. Debre asked Dr. Kissinger how he saw all this. The French saw it with great misgivings.

Dr. Kissinger said before commenting he wanted to come back to the ABM question. Before the French talked to anybody else, Dr. Kissinger would first want to let the Ambassador know our approach. We want to avoid a refusal. If he told the Ambassador not to make the request it would not mean a refusal. We would have to find some other way. (Dr. Kissinger asked Mr. Sonnenfeldt to look into the matter in Washington.)

As regards MBFR, Dr. Kissinger asked whether it would contribute to a lowering of defense attitudes? He said that to some extent it would, although this trend was taking place anyway. But it was contributed to more by the European Security Conference than by MBFR and, with respect, the French were pushing the former more than we were. We have always been dubious about it. Dr. Kissinger said we have no illusions about the world today. We

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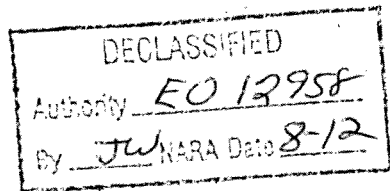
fully recognize that one possible Soviet goal is to use detente for offensive purposes and to achieve the Finlandization of Europe and, as all of us do, we also have a tough domestic situation. We have to maneuver and by participating in the process move it in a constructive direction. Dr. Kissinger asked Debre to look at the history of MBFR. The Europeans invented MBFR to stop unilateral US reductions. When we picked it up the Europeans invented the European Security Conference to kill MBFR. No one told the truth to anyone and we were stuck in a miasma.

On the practical side, we had, in this Administration, conducted many studies. We concluded that we have to go about the subject in a technically meaningful way, otherwise there would merely be a unilateral reduction, except perhaps in France. We are trying to trade something that will happen anyway for something that is technically competent and that doesn't diminish security.

Some people who are opposed to defense are now advocating "simple cuts" -- 10%, 20%, 30%. As in SALT, we have been doing very detailed work and concluded that a straight percentage cut is bad. A cut of less than 10% is unverifiable and one of more than 10% is disadvantageous, although of course the Europeans might drive us into it. We need the French intellectual contribution. We want to put together a package that is more complex and that will not weaken defense. Once the subject gets technical, it will become boring to the public, although it would still of course have symbolic importance. This, Dr. Kissinger said, was our strategy and after November it would become even more effective. (After November, Dr. Kissinger said we will have our cultural revolution.)

Debre said that he was struck by the point that MBFR had been invented by the Europeans to stop Mansfield. Dr. Kissinger said that this had been right as an effort to prevent unilateral cuts, but then it took on a life of its own. Debre asked how far we were going to go on MBFR. Dr. Kissinger said that he had told many Europeans that they should be careful about what they proposed because one day we will accept it. The old luxury was gone where Europeans could make proposals and rely on the US to be tough and take the heat. How far would we go on MBFR? If McGovern were elected, of course, all would be changed. But as far as this Administration was concerned, we would go as far as we think security permits. We will not cut unilaterally or use MBFR for condominium. We want negotiations in which we can talk realistically to the Europeans.

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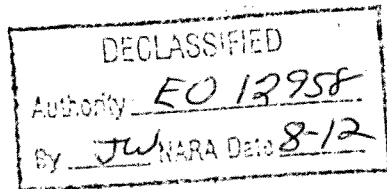
Dr. Kissinger then referred to the utter confusion in NATO military policy. Some of it is a nightmare. There were supposed to be stocks for 90 day but in fact this was not so. No ally had the same stocking pattern and there were different expenditure rates. (Debre interjected that the French had three weeks.) The conclusion to be drawn from this was nightmarish and if Mansfield got ahold of it he would prove that we are hostages to the Europeans, or maybe could not even fight ourselves. Mansfield could kill us. We have to get a credible defense that people believe in. We will not reduce unless the threats to us are reduced. The only problem was whether the Europeans are going to be realistic. Dr. Kissinger said that he was speaking frankly and assumed Debre was reporting only to President Pompidou. Debre confirmed this, adding that the Ambassador was a close friend of Pompidou's. Dr. Kissinger said he knew this and hoped soon to have a talk with the Ambassador. Debre said the French were interested in bilateral exchanges with us on this subject. Dr. Kissinger said we were prepared to discuss it with the French bilaterally and wanted to get their opinions, but until November it was best not to get it into the bureaucracy. Debre said he understood.

Debre then said that at the end of SALT the Soviets had talked to the US about the allied nuclear forces -- the four British submarines and the five French. Debre said that the French might have a sixth boat. How did the US see the Soviet view.

Dr. Kissinger said that the Soviets told us that they calculated their level of 62 boats by including the British and French boats. We had told them that they could calculate this any way they wanted but we did not accept it. Dr. Kissinger said that the French would not be under pressure from us with regard to the sixth boat. If the Soviets tried to build an extra boat, we would not accept it. We, for our part, could not do anything until 1978. But the French will be under no pressure from us to limit their forces. Debre said all their forces would be based on submarines. Dr. Kissinger said that if you had a force there was no point making it absurd. The French may be put under pressure from elsewhere in Washington but if so they should come to us at the White House and we would get it straightened out.

The Ambassador said he wanted to comment about the European Conference and detente. It was true the French pushed it but not as a way to cut defenses. On the contrary, the French want strength. Dr. Kissinger said he worried about it because the Conference involved such vagueness and so many pressures. How could one measure success? But MBFR was so technical

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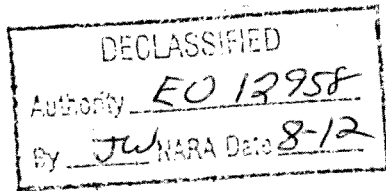
that nothing would happen for two years and people would forget about it. Debre said that the European Conference should really be thought of as appealing to the nations of the East. Dr. Kissinger said that that aspect was all right. But the danger that the French saw in MBFR, we saw in the Conference. Debre repeated that the Conference should not be seen as a pretext for diminishing defense. Dr. Kissinger referred to our experience with SALT. For years we had published figures regarding the adverse trend in strategic weapons. The New York Times said we were using them to scare people. Now that the figures were enshrined in the SALT agreement and an international fact of life, people finally took them seriously. Senator Stennis was an example. We need the same thing with MBFR if the Europeans cooperate. Think for example of the impact of the fact that the Soviets have 13,000 tanks in Europe. The Ambassador said that in strategic weapons there was a balance but in Europe the Soviets already have an overwhelming superiority. How could this be handled? Dr. Kissinger said we have to make serious proposals that deal with this and have a serious defense posture, if the European cooperate.

Debre than said he was worried about the Germans. They must not be helped to get nuclear weapons. The Germans were extremely interested in uranium enrichment. At present this was for civilian purposes but it has military implications, and the Germans must receive no help. Dr. Kissinger said we were not doing anything to help them. He, personally, and the Government are clear that the Germans should not have nuclear weapons. Did Debre think that the Brandt government has the stamina to get nuclear weapons? Debre said it was not the government but the industrialists. Dr. Kissinger said we do not favor German nuclear weapons and would not consciously support Germany's getting them. Of course, there was always stupidity. Dr. Kissinger went on to say that he did favor French talks with the British. Debre said they were very slow. Dr. Kissinger thought they might speed up after November. As the President pointed out to Pompidou, we had no objection in principle. The French are familiar with our view.

Dr. Kissinger then said that we were eager to set up a reliable channel and he assumed that the Ambassador was it. Debre said yes for President Pompidou and himself.

Debre then referred to a French draft agreement which would permit US nuclear-powered forces to call at French ports. He recalled that such

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visits had been stopped some years ago by French legislation but the draft recently given to the US in Paris would make port calls possible again. Dr. Kissinger said he had not heard of this problem.

Dr. Kissinger then said the greatest danger for the West was that each country may think it has a special recipe for dealing with the Communists. We have to synchronize our actions.

As the conversation closed, Dr. Kissinger said he had another point to make. The French Foreign Minister was currently in Peking. Could he be asked to restrain his imagination on Vietnam. Important decisions were in process of being made in Hanoi and Peking and elsewhere. It was a very sensitive time. The Ambassador replied that the French wanted only to be helpful.

Dr. Kissinger then briefly spoke alone with Debre on the patio, and he then took him and the Ambassador to see the President.

Helmut Sonnenfeldt

Original: Dr. Kissinger

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