



October 09, 1975
Memorandum for the Record by Helmut Sonnenfeldt,
'Conversation with Delpech'

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Summary:

Description of conversation between Sonnenfeldt and Jean-Laurens Delpech, French Minister of Armaments, on October 7. Delpech asked about the status of US nuclear assistance to France. He specifically asks about French requests for testing of reentry vehicle material in US nuclear tests, the importation of advanced computers, technical assistance with booster trigger design, and information on submarine vulnerabilities. Other topics included the French sale of helicopters to China and the potential sale of ECM equipment to Arab states.

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ADVISOR
DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON

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October 9, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

FROM: Helmut Sonnenfeldt 
SUBJECT: Conversation with Delpech

Delpech called on me on October 7 to review our cooperative programs. I opened the conversation by stating that I had understood that he discussed with General Scowcroft the following subjects: samples, the computer, a booster trigger, the cover story, sales to China including SONAR and the F-1 Mirage, ECM sales to the Arabs, and plasma generators. Delpech confirmed that that list was comprehensive.

Samples: On the question of exposing French RV material samples in a US nuclear test, I told Delpech that we needed more time to complete our review of the legal situation. Delpech commented that he is under considerable pressure because, if the results will require changes in the M-20 missile, he will need to know as soon as possible in order to change the final specifications. He noted that we have had the samples for several months. He said that in the past other samples have been tested at the Nevada test site and that the French have strictly protected the results. I asked him when previous samples had been tested by the US. He responded only that the results were kept very secret and known to only three people in France.

Plasma Generators: Delpech said that France badly needed to expose the re-entry materials to plasma jets so as to simulate the erosive conditions of re-entry. I responded that we believed that this would be possible using US facilities and that he should discuss this with Currie.

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CDC 7600 Computer: I stated that the formal application for an export license which had been filed with the Department of Commerce was still being processed. It ultimately may have to go to the Secretary and the President. Delpech commented that General Scowcroft had stated that he expected results within one month. Delpech added that France already has four of these computers which were acquired under a prohibition on use in weapons design. He said that they would much prefer to have one that they could use with a clear conscience.

Booster Trigger: Delpech said that the French needed information on the design of their booster trigger. I responded that Delpech should submit the details to Cotter and Currie, who would subsequently have to seek authority from the White House. Delpech said that the French could explain how the trigger works and will need only negative advice.

Cover Story: Delpech mentioned again using the cover of talks aimed at protection of nuclear materials from terrorists. I said that such a cover would not work since, as we had told him before, our people involved in anti-terrorism were not involved in the current talks. The best method that we see would be to describe the meetings as a continuation of general consultations on defense matters, following up on the conversations which Secretary Schlesinger had conducted in Paris last month. Delpech said he would think this over.

Sales to PRC: Delpech said that as we know, they were selling twenty-five helicopters to the Chinese. The question that has now arisen is whether the French should sell SONAR equipment to go with the helicopters. Delpech thought that it should be in the US interests to strengthen Chinese ASW. He said that the SONAR would not be used against US submarines (SIC). Delpech added that the French are also contemplating the sale of F-1 Mirage aircraft to the Chinese. I asked Delpech to spell out in a memo what is involved in both cases. Once we have a memo we can take the question up with the Secretary.

ECM for Arab States: Delpech said that he thought it would be useful for perhaps the French, the US, the FRG, the UK and the Italians to have a quiet conversation on what sort of ECM equipment might be sold to Arab states. He noted that there exists the possibility that this equipment may be used against our own NATO weapons

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systems. I agreed that this could be a genuine problem. Delpech said that in the process of negotiating the sale of anti-radar jamming equipment to Egypt, the latter had revealed to the French a UK proposal which involved much more sophisticated equipment. Delpech said that we needed an agreement among the Western countries so that we can maintain our technological advantage over the Arabs, or else no Western Navy would be inviolate in the Mediterranean.

Reactor Sales: I told Delpech that we had communicated to him in September our revised position on reactor sales to the Soviet Union and how we would handle these sales in COCOM. Delpech responded that our position was satisfactory to him.

Submarine Vulnerability: Delpech said that the French are concerned with Soviets threats and not with US tactics. Once again, the French need negative advice more than positive information. I told Delpech that I understood that our defense experts would be prepared to review the French program with him. I asked him if he also wanted to get into SLBM targetting. Delpech said that the French have had some conversations with the US on targets but that the French have different goals. They wish to be in a position to inflict damage on 20-30% of the Soviet Union. The French are particularly interested in demographic targets.

Nuclear Safety Talks: I asked Delpech how these talks have been going and he said that all goes well.

cc: EYES ONLY - NSC - Gen. Scowcroft
NSC - Mr. Lodal

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