

November 25, 1975

**Memorandum of Conversation between Roger C.
Molander and M. Conze, 'Meeting with M. Conze of
France, November 24, 1975'**

Citation:

"Memorandum of Conversation between Roger C. Molander and M. Conze, 'Meeting with M. Conze of France, November 24, 1975'", November 25, 1975, Wilson Center Digital Archive, National Archives, Record Group 59, Office of the Counselor, Helmut Sonnenfeldt, 1955-77, box 14. Obtained and contributed by William Burr and included in NPIHP Research Update #2. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112435>

Summary:

Conze asked about the status of several French requests for nuclear assistance. These included their request for a CDC 7600 mainframe computer, the testing of reentry vehicle material, and technical help with the M-4 ballistic missile. Sonnenfeldt informed Conze that assistance with booster trigger design had not be authorized as it conflicted with US legal restriction in the Atomic Energy Act.

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MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE XGDS

November 25, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Meeting with M. Conze of France, November 24, 1975

ATTENDEES: M. Conze
Helmut Sonnenfeldt
Roger C. Molander *RCM*

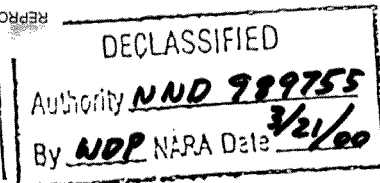
M. Conze indicated that he would be meeting with Cotter on Tuesday (November 24, 1975) and with Walsh the following day. He then briefly reviewed the topics covered in the meetings held in October with DOD and ERDA representatives and also mentioned the October meeting between Delpech and Sonnenfeldt ~~and Hyland~~ ^{and Hyland}. He mentioned the exchange of basic physical data which would be forthcoming as a result of the meetings with DOD and ERDA and also the fact that they had exposed Dr. Agnew to the "two points" (apparently referring to the fact that they described two design concepts for the "booster trigger" to Agnew in October).

M. Conze then raised several specific points which he said M. Delpech had asked him to bring up.

CDC 7600

Conze inquired as to what we planned to do with the request for a CDC 7600 for their nuclear weapons development program. Sonnenfeldt indicated that we were pushing on our internal government consideration of this issue but that it was not an easy problem to work. Sonnenfeldt indicated, however, that we were making some progress in our internal deliberations and that a response would probably be forthcoming in the fairly near future. He explained to M. Conze that there was an established mechanism involving various agencies that had to be used and that we were trying to use this mechanism to get a positive decision. M. Conze asked if we anticipated a positive decision; Sonnenfeldt indicated that we couldn't promise anything but that some response would hopefully be forthcoming soon. M. Conze indicated that this issue was

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a great problem for them and that although they could run some calculations with their current computers, they are reorganizing their AEC and the organization will be affected by whether or not they have the 7600.

Tests of RV Materials

Conze said that DOD had informed them that the RV samples that they had provided earlier this year had been tested in a Nevada test. He said they were anxiously waiting for the results. Sonnenfeldt indicated that there were serious and substantial problems with releasing the results and that these problems were under legal review. Conze indicated that they badly needed the test results since they were planning to put the M-20 in service in the near future. Molander noted that the legality of releasing the test results was apparently in part dependent on the results themselves and since the test had only recently been completed the legal review was not as yet completed. Sonnenfeldt emphasized that although we had problems on this and the CDC issue, they should be assured of our good will in the effort to assist them.

French Exports to China

Conze also inquired about our reaction to the proposed sonar and F-1 exports to China (Delpech had raised this issue during his October visit). Sonnenfeldt indicated that the French would have to wait for our reaction to the proposed exports until after the President's trip to China. Conze noted that they (the French) have stopped working on this matter pending receipt of US views. Sonnenfeldt indicated that this matter was not unrelated to both US and French relations with China, and that we wanted to get our China people involved before making a judgment on this.

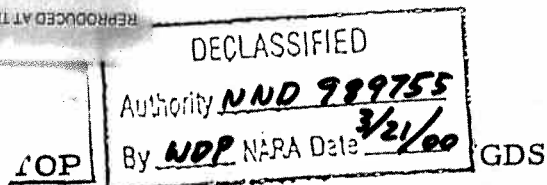
Underground Testing

Conze indicated that an October meeting on underground testing had been very fruitful and that he has no problems in the cooperation program in that area. He later indicated that their latest underground shots had gone over well and that another shot was expected within a few days. He noted that the French particularly appreciated the assistance that had been given by the US in the design details for their underground testing program.

Missile Cooperation

Conze noted that the French had presented the details of their M-4 project to Walsh's team in October and that they particularly needed advice on

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the choice and sizing of the M-4 reentry bodies. He also raised the issue of ablation tests for French RVs in US plasma generator facilities and said that, if possible, the French would like to have two or three representatives present during such tests (which will take place at a DNA facility). Sonnenfeldt said we would consider this possibility and told Conze to bring this up at his meeting with Walsh.

Cover Story

Sonnenfeldt indicated that we have not, as yet, been able to find a cover story for the missile cooperation program, although, so far, such a cover story has not been needed. He noted that the new Secretary of Defense had not previously been informed of the cooperation program and that he might have new ideas on a cover story that might be used on a contingency basis.

System Vulnerabilities

Sonnenfeldt asked Conze if the discussions on submarine vulnerability had been satisfactory. Conze indicated that they had been and that the French desired information on current and projected Soviet threats and that he anticipated further meetings on this matter within a few months. Molander indicated to Conze that at such a meeting, the French should be prepared to discuss the technical details of both their silos and submarines in order to provide the US experts with the basis for assessing their vulnerability.

Booster Trigger

Sonnenfeldt called Conze's attention to the fact that both he (Conze) and Delpuch had told DOD that Scowcroft and Sonnenfeldt had said that assistance to the French to the design of the booster trigger for their new thermomuclear weapon had been approved when, in fact, Sonnenfeldt and Scowcroft had made no such statement. Sonnenfeldt pointed out that even providing negative guidance for the booster trigger appears to be in conflict with the terms of the Atomic Energy Act. Sonnenfeldt emphasized that the program of cooperation with the French would not work if they continue to relate the substance of their White House conversations to DOD since this only complicated the decision-making process. He pointed out that neither he (Sonnenfeldt) nor Scowcroft had said that they would provide information for needed guidance but only that we would look at the problem. He reemphasized that we could give no ^{assurance} ~~insurance~~ of assistance in this area. He further emphasized that the whole relationship could be compromised if the French continue to reference White

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House conversations in their conversations with their DOD contacts and that the White House will provide DOD with the information it requires on this program. Sonnenfeldt particularly emphasized the sensitivity and delicacy of conversations on the booster trigger because of the legal problems involved.

MRV/MIRVs

Sonnenfeldt noted that the French had provided a full briefing on their MRV system in October and emphasized, so that there would be no misunderstanding, that we had no authority to help them with MIRVs; the existing authority applied exclusively to MRVs. Conze indicated that he understood this.

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