

July 14, 1970

Memorandum from Melvin R. Laird to Henry A. Kissinger, 'Assistance to the French Ballistic Missile Program'

Citation:

"Memorandum from Melvin R. Laird to Henry A. Kissinger, 'Assistance to the French Ballistic Missile Program'", July 14, 1970, Wilson Center Digital Archive, FOIA Release. Obtained and contributed by William Burr and included in NPIHP Research Update #2. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113689>

Summary:

Summary of John Foster's exploratory talks with the French. They asked for assistance with both their land-based IRBMs and submarine-launched ballistic missiles.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

SECRET
THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

14 JUL 1970

SECRET/NODIS/SENSITIVE

MEMORANDUM FOR THE ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT FOR NATIONAL SECURITY
AFFAIRS

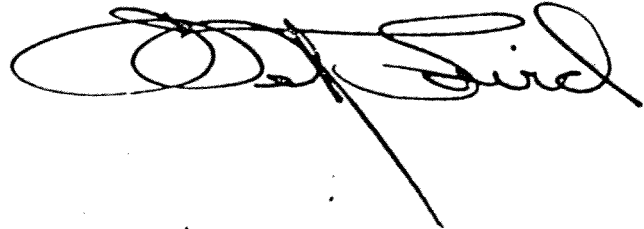
SUBJECT: Assistance to the French Ballistic Missile Program

As suggested in your memorandum of April 24, Dr. Foster has just conducted exploratory talks with the French concerning their ballistic missile program. I have attached hereto a summary of his findings.

In brief, the French are having difficulties in certain areas of their missile program and would like U.S. assistance, in an attempt to save the time and money it would take to work them out on their own. It is a matter in which they appear strongly interested and also one where, with care on our part, we can provide considerable help without compromise of any significant information relative to our own systems.

If the President wishes to be forthcoming and improve cooperation with the French, as stated in your earlier memorandum of March 16, this seems a promising area.

I am prepared to discuss the subject further when you are ready.



Attachment

Declassified/Released on 12-1-83
under provisions of E.O. 12958
by J. Saunders, National Security Council

DCNCRATED AT 12 YEAR
INTERVALS; NOT AUTOMATICALLY
DECLASSIFIED. DOD DIR 5200.10

SECRET/NODIS/SENSITIVE

Sec Def Cont Fr. X-

3843

UNCLASSIFIED

25

RESULTS OF U.S./FRENCH MEETING
ON STRATEGIC MISSILES - JUNE 25, 1970

Dr. John Foster, Director of Defense Research and Engineering, met with M. Jean Blancard, French Ministerial Delegate for Armaments, to discuss French requests for assistance in their ballistic missile program. The purpose of the meeting was exploratory, to ascertain more clearly the nature of French problems and assistance desired.

In general, they would like help in both their land-based IRBM and submarine launched missile programs. Their purpose is to save the time and money it would take to work out the problems on their own. There appears little reason to doubt that they eventually would be successful even without aid from us.

A brief summary of each area of interest is presented below. With the exception of star tracker guidance (where, as noted, we said we could not help), and the involvement of U.S. missile companies, it is believed possible to render assistance, to varying degrees, in each area - without compromise to our own systems and without revealing information which, should it fall into Soviet hands, would be of major concern to us. Specific details of course, have not been worked out.

Any desire on the part of the U.S. to assist France in the strategic area could conflict with our desire regarding SALT. It would probably not be possible to prevent knowledge of such assistance.

SUMMARY OF AREAS IN WHICH FRENCH REQUEST ASSISTANCE

Land-based IRBMs:

o Reliability and Quality Control

They mentioned specific areas such as propulsion, mechanical assembly, and cabling, but these were apparently only representative. They evidently are not satisfied with the reliability demonstrated in their flight test program. They seem to believe the problem lies in their fabrication and associated test and inspection processes and that a study and application of American manufacturing and quality control techniques can help.

o Solid Propellant Rocket Motors

Although carried as a separate agenda item, the problem is much the same as above -- i.e., how to fabricate motors which will perform reliably. They mentioned specific areas such as bonding, igniters, and propellant characteristics and would like to place a contract with a U.S. firm for technical assistance.

SECRET/NODIS/SENSITIVE

~~UNCLASSIFIED~~

DECLASSIFIED AT 12 YEAR INTERVALS;
NOT AUTOMATICALLY DECLASSIFIED
DOD DIR. 5200.10

SECRET/NODIS/SENSITIVE

UNCLASSIFIED

- o Resistance of RV Materials to "FLASH"

This is included under land-based, although the problem is the same for sea-based. "FLASH" is their expression relating to a nuclear environment and they are seeking as much help -- theory and practice -- as they can get in hardening their RVs to nuclear effects.

Submarine-launched Ballistic Missiles:

- o Star Tracker Guidance in Missile

They stated their primary interest here is in improving accuracy of SLBMs. They mentioned the attendant virtue of permitting a longer time between submarine navigation "resets" -- which is a potentially significant point bearing on reducing submarine vulnerability. They would like to obtain theoretical and experimental information, and also fabrication assistance from a U.S. firm. The discussion brought out a firmly stated French objective of providing capability for city attack only, not silo.

We pointed out our belief that they do not need such guidance for city-type accuracy and that, since we are not using it for any present or near future systems, we could not help in this area.

- o Inertial Navigation for Missile Submarines

They are interested in improved precision, reliability and service life - applicable to what they call their second generation system (First generation system is being delivered now).

SECRET/NODIS/SENSITIVE

UNCLASSIFIED
SECRET