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By: J NARA Date 1/6/99

O.P.A.

NODIS REVIEW

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INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

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August 28, 1972

Reviewed by: [Signature]

To: The Deputy Secretary

From: PM Ronald I. Spiers

...to continue or continued sensitivity. SO [unclear] without S/S concurrence or a need to [unclear]

Military Cooperation with France: Outcome of the Debre Visit

During his six day visit to the United States in mid-July M. Debre, the French Minister of Defense, met with the President, Dr. Kissinger, the Secretary of Defense, the Acting Secretary of State, the Director of Research and Engineering for the Department of Defense, as well as the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence and visited a number of strategic weapons installations. The talks were cordial and productive; the visits educational.

The interaction between the United States Government and the French Government which occurred during the Debre visit, however, was much broader than the sum total of the various conversations the French Defense Minister had with senior US officials. The members of M. Debre's official party (M. Blancard, Minister-Delegate for Armaments; M. Boisdevaix, M. Debre's political advisor; and General Mathon, M. Debre's military aide) also met with US officials.

Since M. Debre's colleagues met at length with their American technical counterparts while the Minister was carrying through his schedule of official calls, the total impact of the "Debre visit" can be assessed only after the content of the technicians' discussions is known and weighed. So far, however, the Defense Department has been very stingy in sharing information about the technical level exchanges. DOD has refused to make the MemCon of the Debre-Foster conversation available to State on the grounds that it "contains information that is no business of the Department of State". In addition, no memoranda of conversation were made of the technical discussions. Documents handed to

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the DOD technicians by the French representatives have not been disseminated to State.

The "information gap" is made all the more serious by the accumulating evidence which suggests strongly that John Foster may have led his French counterpart to believe that the United States Government was prepared to provide the French with a wealth of exceedingly sensitive strategic weapons technology. He has subsequently taken steps to disabuse the French of at least part of their mistaken expectations, but further action may still be necessary.

The story, as pieced together, appears to be the following:

(1) The French gave the US representatives (apparently during the Debre-Foster meeting) a "wish list" of technology and technical assistance they would like to obtain from the US. The French explicitly acknowledged that many of the items on their list involved extremely sensitive technology which the US might not wish to provide or might not be able to share, given the restrictions imposed by the Atomic Energy Act. Moreover, the French indicated orally during the Debre-Foster session those items on the list they considered the most important or to which they attached the highest priority.

The "wish list":

- reiterates the two year old French request for full design and production information on the next generation of strategic missiles;
- requests the maximum possible information on the miniaturizing of front end components, i.e. the arming and fuzing systems and the physics package of the nuclear warhead;
- reiterates the request M. Debre made in June to Carl Walske (Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Atomic Energy) for assistance on the training of crews for and the operation of nuclear ballistic missile submarines;
- requests an assessment of the possibility of fitting POSEIDON missiles and warheads into the French missile submarines with a view toward the possible purchase of this US weapons system.

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Commenting on the French "wish list" Carl Walske declared the technology requested clearly (a) projects the current US-French missile exchanges into the next generation of French missiles, and (b) exceeds the present Presidential guidelines. Noting that the British technicians had asked us for far more than the US is prepared to give the UK, Walske commented that the French engineers have now requested even more than the British have.

(2) After M. Debre left the meeting, Foster and Blancard, supported by their staffs, continued the discussion for several more hours. For a period of roughly thirty minutes at one point during the afternoon, Foster was the only American in the room with the French. Foster reportedly told Blancard that there are some things on the French "wish list" the US can do since some of the items are neither Restricted Data nor Formerly Restricted Data. He also reportedly told Blancard that he saw no reason why Admiral Rickover or someone else in the Navy could not discuss the "management of nuclear submarines" with the French. While it is not clear what Foster had in mind, he presumably meant the selection, training, and handling of submarine crews plus the organization and the execution of submarine operations (SSBN cruises, SSN patrols).

(3) Following up his conversation with Blancard, Foster, accompanied by Walske, visited Admiral Rickover to suggest the Navy undertake talks with the French on the management of nuclear submarines. Walske, referring to the ongoing nuclear weapons safety talks with the French, proposed that Rickover discuss the safety of nuclear propulsion plants with the French. Admiral Rickover vigorously declined to undertake either project.

(4) M. Debre departed in a state of euphoria, firmly convinced that the US had agreed, within the constraints imposed by the Atomic Energy Act, to provide the assistance on technology and military management that his technicians had requested.

(5) The following day Foster, again accompanied by Walske, met with Secretary Laird to report on his discussions with the French technicians. Mr. Laird seems to have been disturbed by the French representatives' apparent misreading of US intentions. In any event, he directed there be no new departures in the military technology talks with the French until after the US Presidential elections, and

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directed his two chief technicians to take whatever steps were necessary to slow things down.

(6) In response to the British Ambassador's urgent request, Secretary Laird saw Lord Cromer two days later to reassure him about the scope and import of the Debre visit. According to a middle level British Embassy officer, Mr. Laird told Lord Cromer that (a) the French had repeatedly pressed hard for an unrealistic amount of technical assistance, (b) he was quite annoyed by the persistence of the French, and (c) the US had no intention of responding affirmatively to the French importunings.

(7) Upon his return to Paris, M. Blancard wrote to Foster underscoring French interest in obtaining the advanced technology they had discussed during their visit to Washington and reiterating their earlier request for permission to talk directly to US missile manufacturers and to visit US production facilities. The letter reportedly repeats the French argument that conference table discussions between government R&D engineers and the examination of specification sheets and blueprints are no substitute for firsthand observation of production lines.

(8) On August 14, Foster replied to Blancard's letter. He reportedly cautioned against any over inflated expectations, and suggested the French provide us as the first order of business with a much more precise indication of what they desired so that we might study the matter fully and then to work out in time a careful reply. Foster agreed to receive Blancard in Washington on August 29 for this purpose.

Next Steps:

M. Blancard is expected to arrive Monday afternoon (August 28) and have dinner with Foster that evening. They plan to continue their discussions the following morning. In addition, Blancard is slated to meet with Warren Nutter who plans to reiterate the "suggestions" Mr. Laird made to M. Debre about US claims for costs incurred in relocating US forces out of France, the need for stand by logistics facilities in France, and the desirability of coordinating French and US nuclear targetting. M. Brunet, the civilian head of the French missile program is meanwhile slated to meet with the DDR&E strategic weapons experts on August 28, 30, and 31.

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