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By JAF NARA Date 10/8/01



THE COUNSELOR  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
WASHINGTON

F - France

VERY URGENT

SECRET/SENSITIVE

February 8, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY

FROM: Helmut Sonnenfeldt

SUBJECT: French Interest in US Underground Nuclear  
Test Technology

*Put in folder  
for Librand.*

This memo (Tab A) concerns an effort by the French CEA to obtain some underground cables from an American firm for use in their nuclear testing and their request to talk to US government experts regarding the cables. The people in State and ERDA who have been working on this problem have no knowledge of the broader aspects flowing out of Martinique.

I would recommend that you take no action on this memo for now. If you agree, I will tell Vest to keep this thing under control until your return, when you can look at it in the overall context of assistance to the French.

Approve \_\_\_\_\_

Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

*Don't know if Secretary  
noted on this stuff in  
Paris.*

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
ACTION MEMORANDUM

S/S

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February 7, 1975

To: The Secretary  
Through: C - Mr. Sonnenfeldt  
From: PM - George <sup>ON</sup> Vest.

French Interest in US Under-  
ground Nuclear Test Technology

The Problem

Telecommunications Research Incorporated, a New York-based international broker, is attempting to obtain information from the Energy Research and Development Administration concerning cables and connectors for use in the French underground nuclear test program. In addition, TRI is attempting to arrange a meeting between French Atomic Energy Commission (CEA) and ERDA cable experts. There have been other, informal indications that the French would like United States assistance on all aspects of the technology of testing underground. ERDA has requested the Department's views.

Background/Analysis

Each year since 1966 the French have conducted a series of atmospheric nuclear tests over the Mururoa Atoll in French Polynesia. These tests have generated strong criticism worldwide because of environmental or arms control concerns. At least partly in consideration of this fact, President Giscard d'Estaing announced last June that after their 1974 atmospheric tests, France would be prepared to conduct future nuclear tests underground.

In December 1974, a representative of a New York-based firm, Telecommunications Research Incorporated (TRI), contacted ERDA officials seeking information concerning composite cables for use by the French in conducting their planned underground nuclear tests. This is one of several instances in recent months in which the French have sought information concerning safety and techniques of underground nuclear testing. During discussions in December with then AEC

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Chairman Ray, this subject was raised by Andre Giraud, Administrator General of the CEA and Jacques Chevallier, Director, CEA Division of Military Applications. More recently, in an informal thank you letter to the AEC's Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory, Chevallier reiterated French interest in this area.

We understand that TRI is a broker company under contract to the French CEA on this particular project. As a result of discussions between the TRI representatives and ERDA officials it is clear that the French (a) need help in developing a viable underground test program, (b) at least at the technical level, wish to get that help from ERDA, and (c) have used TRI to probe the US readiness to provide such help. Most recently, TRI has attempted to arrange a meeting between ERDA officials and a representative of the CEA. ERDA is stalling on this request while they obtain our views.

The information which the French are seeking, although not generally available, is unclassified and therefore could be obtained through other means. The cables themselves are manufactured by at least three US firms. Apparently, the French are unable to procure cables of this quality from a French manufacturer.

If the USG provides underground test technology or equipment to the GOF, indiscriminate use by the French could expose the US to the possibility of charges that we had violated provisions of the Limited Test Ban Treaty or the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

-- The LTBT prohibits Parties from encouraging or participating in the detonation of nuclear devices by any state underground, if radioactive debris is caused to be present outside the territorial limits of the state conducting the test (Article I). Therefore, if the French test program is so designed or conducted as to cause radioactive debris to be present beyond French territorial borders (a distinct possibility in the South Pacific), and if the US had in any way encouraged or assisted the testing, we would be open for criticism.

-- Article I of the NPT prohibits nuclear-weapons states from assisting or encouraging any non-nuclear-weapon state

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to acquire nuclear explosive devices. Providing information and hardware solely for French use would not violate this provision. However, in view of our obligations under this Article, if we assist the French it may be prudent to ask for assurances that they will not transfer the technology, hardware, or any information gathered from their use to non-nuclear-weapon states, and to retain the right to suspend further supplying of information or material if these assurances are violated.

In connection with the present problem, there are really two issues that should be addressed:

- 1) In the short term, how do we respond to the specific French request on cables and to the TRI request for a CEA/ERDA meeting?
- 2) In the longer term, what should US policy be on assistance to the French, via sharing our technology and know-how, in the development of their underground test program?

#### Request for Information and Meeting on Cables

There are several ways in which we could handle the current French interest:

Option 1. ERDA could inform TRI that they are unable to provide any information along the lines requested by the French. This would clearly convey to the French the message that the US Government is not interested in providing assistance to them in their efforts to establish an underground test program. It could adversely affect the timing and, perhaps, the ultimate success of the French transition from atmospheric to underground testing. As a result, Option 1 would be inconsistent with our oft-stated policy of urging all nations that have not yet done so to adhere to the provisions of the LTBT. More important, however, if the interest expressed by the French CEA was sponsored by the French political leadership our rebuff could adversely affect US-French diplomatic relations. In addition, inasmuch as TRI would retain a right to obtain unclassified information under the Freedom of Information Act, selection of this option would serve no useful purpose.

Option 2. ERDA could inform TRI they are prepared to provide cable information to them and arrange for them to discuss specific requirements with the manufacturers. This

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option would give TRI unclassified information it could offer the CEA. It would keep discussions at a commercial level and focused on a specific, technical issue. It would also reserve flexibility either for responding to additional French requests or for approaching them directly, in the event a policy decision is made to do so. It would not be as helpful as we could be, however.

Option 3. ERDA could meet with the French, providing the information mentioned in Option 2 plus detailed technical discussion. This option would provide needed assistance to the French in their efforts to transition to an underground test program and it would have favorable impact on US-French relations. With regard to Option 3, there are two suboptions:

a. TRI could arrange the ERDA-CEA meeting.

This suboption would keep discussions at the technical level and focused on a specific issue. It would also reserve to the USG a great degree of flexibility for the future, either for responding to the additional French requests which we expect or for offering further assistance to them, in the event a policy decision to do so is made. It has what some would consider a disadvantage in that it places a private US firm in the position of arranging a meeting between representatives of two sovereign states.

b. The Department could arrange the meeting by informing the French Embassy that the USG is prepared to assist the French on the cable issue and that, to this end, ERDA could provide cable information directly to representatives of the CEA at French request.

(In this case, ERDA could inform TRI that the USG wishes to handle contacts with foreign governments directly and that we are in contact with the French.)

This suboption would provide the cable information directly to the French, thereby indicating US preference for handling these requests in official rather than commercial channels. TRI would probably claim credit with its French employers for their access to this information and try to arrange for the sale of any materials. (Should TRI desire access of its own, it would be granted under the procedures prescribed by the Freedom of Information Act.)

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All of the foregoing is focused on the question of providing technical information to the French. We believe that if this information is provided in either of the ways described in Option 3, the French will conclude that the USG is also prepared to issue an export license for the cables themselves. This factor should be taken into account in selecting from among the options discussed above.

#### Bureau/Office Views

We favor Option 3b (The Department could inform the French Embassy that the USG is prepared to assist on the cable issue and that ERDA could provide the desired information directly at French request.) Selection of this option would put the US response on an official level without signalling open-ended assistance to the French underground testing program. It would confine TRI's activities to the commercial level, retain sufficient flexibility for the USG to relate any further assistance to the state of our bilateral relationship with France, and leave it to the GOF to make further requests on its own initiative, including a CEA/ERDA meeting if desired. EUR and S/P concur.

#### Long Term Policy

Looking to the longer term, how far we should go down this road with the French, and how best to manage any relationship in this area are issues you will want to consider. To this end, we believe that you should have a careful review of diplomatic options, including possible quids, for overall US assistance to the French underground nuclear test program. An essential first step would be a technical interagency analysis, limited in scope and players, of the specific areas of underground testing techniques which could be shared with France and various degrees of possible US sharing in each area. (We envision the Department, DOD, the NSC staff, ACDA, ERDA, and possibly the CIA being involved in this study.) This could be either an informal effort or a formal study conducted in response to a NSSM.

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Recommendations:

That you approve

1. a. Action by the Department to inform the French Embassy that the USG is prepared to assist the French on the cable issue and that, to this end, ERDA could provide cable information directly at French request. (Option 3b)

Approve \_\_\_\_\_ Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

or, alternatively,

b. Action by the Department to inform ERDA that we do not object to TRI arranging discussions between representatives of ERDA and the CEA relative to composite cables for underground testing. (Option 3a)

Approve \_\_\_\_\_ Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

or, alternatively,

c. Action by the Department to inform ERDA that we believe they should provide cable information and contractor names to TRI but should not meet with representatives of CEA. (Option 2)

Approve \_\_\_\_\_ Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

or, alternatively,

d. Action by the Department to inform ERDA that we would prefer they have no discussions with the French and provide no information to TRI. (Option 1)

Approve \_\_\_\_\_ Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

2. Action by the Department to initiate on interagency study on long term US policy toward French underground testing.

Approve \_\_\_\_\_ Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

Informal Interagency Group \_\_\_\_\_

NSSM \_\_\_\_\_

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Drafted by: <sup>JK</sup> PM/NPO:LJHblas/ds:jmm  
2/7/75 ext 21835

Clearances: PM/NPO - Mr. Nosenzo <sup>JK</sup> (draft)  
EUR - Mr. Lowenstein <sup>JK</sup>  
S/P - Mr. Bartholomew <sup>JK</sup> <sup>YLH</sup>  
L/UNA - Mr. Mathenson <sup>JK</sup>