

**October 21, 1969**

**Memorandum from Theodore L. Eliot Jr. to Henry A. Kissinger, 'British Position on Nuclear Cooperation with France'**

**Citation:**

"Memorandum from Theodore L. Eliot Jr. to Henry A. Kissinger, 'British Position on Nuclear Cooperation with France'", October 21, 1969, Wilson Center Digital Archive, National Archives, Record Group 59, Subject-Numeric Files, 1967-69, AE 1-1 Fr-UK. Obtained and contributed by William Burr and included in NPIHP Research Update #2. <https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/110251>

**Summary:**

The British have not made any military or nuclear alliance with France, and they will disclose any such approaches from France to the United States. The U.S. is willing to say in response that they have not been approached by the French and would be willing to disclose any such approach in the future, but the U.S. is not willing say that their position is exactly the same as the British one because they "are not sure of the detailed implications of the broad phraseology of [the British's] statement" and do not want to be bound to any extreme commitments.

**Original Language:**

English

**Contents:**

Original Scan

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Approval recd by memo from Mr. Kissinger  
to Mr. Eliot dated 10/28/69

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Keep this study together.

October 21, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. HENRY A. KISSINGER  
THE WHITE HOUSE

Subject: British Position on Nuclear Cooperation  
with France

Shortly after President Nixon met with Prime Minister Wilson at Mildenhall (August 3, 1969) the British Foreign Office called in the Political Counselor at American Embassy, London, (1) to discuss British views on possible Anglo-French nuclear cooperation, and (2) to have a more specific and definite understanding between our two governments on the question of possible nuclear cooperation with the French. (Enclosure No. 2)

According to Assistant Under Secretary David Bendall, the Prime Minister had made the following points to the President: (1) the British had received no approach from the French on this subject; (2) if they did receive one, they would consider themselves duty bound to consult with the U.S.; (3) HMG's view was that any discussions with the French should be under the NATO umbrella; (4) bilateral discussions and commitments with France could not be conducted except on the basis of full French involvement in the work of the NPG.

Reportedly, Wilson also asked the President (1) if the US had been approached, and (2) if there were a French approach, could Wilson assume that the US could consult with the UK. According to Bendall, the President had replied that (1) there had been no French approach, and (2) the US and UK should consult if anything came up in this regard.

Bendall said the Prime Minister had instructed the Foreign Office to go into the matter with the Embassy with more precision. In addition to the points made earlier, Bendall further elaborated the British position: (1) it was not the British intention to take any initiative themselves; (2) any bilateral cooperation would

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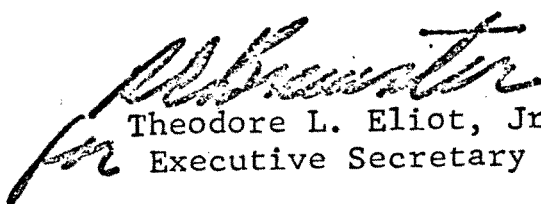
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have to be developed within the context of their common membership in the Alliance, compatible with various British international obligations, NPT, US-UK bilaterals; (3) subject to the foregoing, the British would express willingness to enter into discussions of questions of mutual interest in the field of nuclear defenses; (4) in addition to their concern for the cohesion of the Alliance, the British would be guided by the need to build mutual confidence over the whole range of Anglo-French relations and the hope of encouraging France to return as soon as possible to full cooperation in NATO defense; (5) they would keep the USG closely informed of any exchanges.

The explicit and ultimate objective of this approach by the Foreign Office was to obtain confirmation that the USG (1) would be guided by the same considerations as the British, and (2) would keep HMG closely informed of any exchanges with France in this field. The Foreign Office would also prefer that further contact on this subject be primarily channelized through Embassy London. Embassy London believes that an oral reply, rather than a formal written exchange, will suffice.

Enclosed (Enclosure No. 1) is a draft letter which Assistant Secretary Hillenbrand would send to the Political Counselor at Embassy London, authorizing him to convey orally the following USG position to the Foreign Office: (1) we have not been approached by the French on nuclear defense cooperation, (2) our response would depend on their proposals and the circumstances at the time, (3) we would keep in mind our own various international obligations, (4) we would keep HMG informed of any such exchanges. We would not respond by saying that our position is the same as HMG's, as we are not certain of the detailed implications of the Foreign Office's phraseology and do not wish to be committed to their formulation. This response has the concurrence of Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, G. Warren Nutter.

We would appreciate your concurrence prior to sending this letter to Embassy London.

  
Theodore L. Eliot, Jr.  
Executive Secretary

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Dear Bill:

Ron Spiers has passed on to me your letter of August 14 regarding your conversation with David Bendall on nuclear relationships with the French. You can inform David about our position along the following lines.

We, like the British, have not been approached by the French Government on nuclear defense cooperation. If the French were to approach us, the substance of our response would naturally depend on what they propose and the circumstances at the time. In any case, we would keep very much in mind our various international obligations, the importance of preserving the integrity of NATO, and the working of the NPG. We would keep HMG informed of any such exchanges.

You will note that we do not propose to respond to David by saying that our position is the same as HMG's. We are not sure of the detailed implications of the broad phraseology of his statement and therefore want to avoid becoming committed to his formulation.

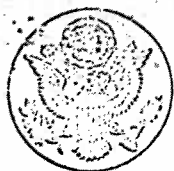
Sincerely,

Martin J. Hillenbrand  
Assistant Secretary  
for European Affairs

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Authority *NND 962002*By *JW* NARA Date *8-30-98*

EMBASSY OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

LONDON

August 14, 1969

SECRETOFFICIAL-INFORMAL

Ronald I. Spiers, Esquire  
Deputy Under Secretary  
Politico-Military Affairs J/PM  
Department of State  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Ron:

Since we do not know how widely the substance of the President's discussion with the Prime Minister has been disseminated, we decided that the enclosed letter might be preferable to a telegram. We told David Bendall that we would proceed in this manner.

Would you please give copies to Marty Hillenbrand and others as appropriate.

Our interpretation is that the British are seeking an oral assurance from us, rather than a formal written exchange, that we will adopt a common stance toward the French along the lines they propose.

Sincerely,

William J. Galloway  
Counselor for Political Affairs

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EMBASSY OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

LONDON

August 14, 1969

SECRETOFFICIAL-INFORMAL

Ronald I. Spiers, Esquire  
Deputy Under Secretary  
Politico-Military Affairs  
J/PM  
Department of State  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Ron:

David Bendall called Alan James and me to the Foreign Office today to discuss British views on possible Anglo-French nuclear cooperation. John Waterfield was with Bendall.

Bendall began by saying that the Prime Minister had discussed this subject with the President at Mildenhall on August 3 and that the Prime Minister had instructed the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defense to follow up on this conversation with the Embassy to give more definitive form to the discussion he and the President had had. Bendall said that the Foreign Office had coordinated with the MOD and that he was speaking on behalf of both.

Bendall then reported the Foreign Office version of what had transpired between the Prime Minister and the President along the following lines:

The Prime Minister had noted that there had been much talk in Parliament and elsewhere about direct Anglo-French nuclear discussion. The British had had no approach from the French, but if they did receive one they would regard themselves duty bound to consult with the US. The Prime Minister inquired whether any suggestion had been made of Franco-American cooperation. He also asked whether he could assume that if there were, the US would consult with the UK. Apparently the President indicated that there had been nothing in this connection, but agreed that the US and UK should consult if anything came up in this regard.

The Prime Minister stated that FMG's view was that any discussions with the French should be under the NATO umbrella. Bilateral discussions and commitments with France, still largely outside the NATO machinery, could not be conducted except on the basis of full French involvement in the work of the NPG.

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Bendall stated that the Prime Minister had indicated that he and the President had ranged swiftly and widely over many subjects at Mildenhall, and he (the PM) thought it important to have a more specific and definite understanding between our two Governments on the question of possible nuclear cooperation with France. Accordingly, the Foreign Office had been instructed to go into this matter with the Embassy with more precision. Bendall then proceeded to spell out the British position as follows:

The British have so far had no approach in any form from the French on nuclear defense cooperation.

It is not the British intention to take any initiative themselves. If the British were to receive an inquiry from the French, they would (a) make clear that any bilateral cooperation would have to be developed within the context of their common membership of the Alliance and where applicable within the appropriate NATO institutions (notably the NPG), and would have to be compatible with various British international obligations, NPT, US-UK bilaterals; (b) subject to the foregoing, the British would express willingness to enter into discussions of questions of mutual interest in the field of nuclear defense; and (c) keep the USG closely informed of any exchanges.

In dealing with this matter, Bendall continued, the British would be guided by concern for the cohesion of the alliance, the need to rebuild mutual confidence over the whole range of Anglo-French relations, and the hope of encouraging France to return as soon as possible to full cooperation in NATO defense.

Bendall said that HMG would be glad of confirmation that the USG would, where relevant, be guided by the same considerations as the British, and would keep HMG closely informed of any exchanges with France in this field. He added that the UK hoped for a response from us reasonably soon.

Bendall indicated that the Foreign Office would prefer that further consultation and contact on this subject be with the Embassy in London but that the British Embassy in Washington would be kept informed.

Sincerely,



William J. Galloway  
Counselor for Political Affairs

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THE WHITE HOUSE  
 WASHINGTON

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October 28, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. Theodore L. Eliot, Jr.  
 Executive Secretary  
 Department of State

SUBJECT: British Position on Nuclear Cooperation with  
 France

In regard to your memorandum of October 21 concerning the UK's approach to us on nuclear cooperation with France, I concur in the text of Assistant Secretary Hillenbrand's proposed letter to our Political Counselor in London.

*[Signature]*  
 Henry A. Kissinger

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