

Memorandum on the development of nuclear energy for exclusively peaceful purposes (23 January 1956)

Caption: On 23 January 1956, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs drafts a memorandum in which it sets out the interest that France would have, along with its European partners, in concentrating on the use of nuclear energy for peaceful and civilian purposes.

Source: Fondation Jean Monnet pour l'Europe, [s.l.]. Archives Jean Monnet. Fonds AMK. 43/5/19.

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URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/memorandum_on_the_development_of_nuclear_energy_for_exclusively_peaceful_purposes_23_january_1956-en-6e285d8d-fa96-4f33-9244-ofdf365obbd7.html



Last updated: 05/07/2016

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(1) In embarking on the manufacture of atomic bombs, France would be demonstrating that it can no longer be a major military power.

The number of atomic bombs that France could manufacture by 1965, for example, would amount to around one-hundredth the American or Russian stockpiles. What is more, the Russians and the Americans already possess hydrogen bombs.

(2) The manufacture of atomic bombs would be a source of insecurity for France. Today, an atomic balance exists between the United States and the Soviet Union. The bombs that France could manufacture would add nothing to the security resulting from American nuclear stockpiles. On the contrary, French atomic bombs would destabilise the balance, because Germany would most likely eventually manufacture some, too.

However, the development of atomic energy for *peaceful* purposes would afford France and other European countries the means of placing atomic energy under international control.

European countries are the ones most interested in establishing world-wide controls of atomic energy. It would take only a few atomic bombs to destroy the European countries, even France or Germany. However, a few atomic bombs would destroy only a small portion of the United States or the Soviet Union. As a result, European countries would not attack the Soviet Union or the United States for fear of being the target of atomic weapons. The threat is not equal, because any riposte would mean total destruction for the European countries.

On the other hand, if they developed atomic energy for exclusively peaceful purposes, European countries could then take steps to establish world-wide control. In that way, they would help to create a new situation in the world. To date, in the words of Winston Churchill, there has been only 'a balance of terror'. No country has yet managed to develop atomic energy for exclusively peaceful purposes. However, by committing themselves to developing industrial applications of atomic discoveries, European countries would be making a choice that would give them a great deal of moral influence, because they would be opting to follow the paths of others. This moral influence may have a practical function. It might influence the conduct of the Americans and the Russians, because it seems that, on both sides, people are aware that humanity might be destroyed by atomic weapons.

(3) By developing atomic energy for exclusively peaceful purposes, European countries may contribute to the future of the West.

Given the new military situation created by atomic weapons, and barring any misunderstanding or accident, there should be no more wars like those in the past. For as long as it exists, East-West rivalry will never be something which may be settled by military might. The outcome will turn on either the internal disintegration of the European countries or their economic and social progress. The contribution that European countries may make to the free world is, precisely, economic and social progress and renewed moral cohesion. They can achieve that by devoting all their resources and efforts to the development of atomic energy for exclusively peaceful purposes.