

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 18, 2009

H.E. Pierre Vimont
Ambassador
Embassy of France
4101 Reservoir Road, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20007

Dear Ambassador Vimont:

We are writing to express our concerns about the proposed sale of a Mistral-class helicopter carrier to Russia. Such a sale would be the most significant military sale ever between a NATO member-state and Russia, and we believe it would have significant implications for all NATO members.

Acquisition of the Mistral would greatly enhance Russia's power projection capabilities. Russia's stated intention to deploy the Mistral in waters adjoining NATO members has, understandably, led several alliance members to raise concerns about the proposed sale. Particularly worrisome is a senior Russian Navy commander's recent statement that the Mistral would allow Russian forces to accomplish in 40 minutes what took them 26 hours to do during the August 2008 invasion of Georgia.

In addition, Russia is not in compliance with and has suspended participation in the Adapted Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, has not honored its 1999 Istanbul Commitments to withdraw from Georgian and Moldovan territory, and is not in compliance with the Russian-Georgian cease-fire agreement negotiated by your government last year. The European Union's report on the Russian invasion concluded that Russia used disproportionate force, illegally initiated a conflict in Abkhazia, and illegally recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In addition, the provisions of both the Wassenaar Arrangement on Export Controls for Conventional Arms and Dual Use Goods and Technologies and the European Union's Code of Conduct for Arms Sales would seem to preclude such a sale in light of Russia's actions and statements undermining regional security. Due to these facts, we question whether the proposed Mistral sale should move forward.

We raise these concerns respectfully as we welcome your country's contributions to global peace and security. France's decision to integrate fully into NATO's military structures strengthens the alliance as does your ongoing commitment of forces to Afghanistan. We have been most impressed by the leadership your government has demonstrated in dealing with the illicit nuclear weapons program of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

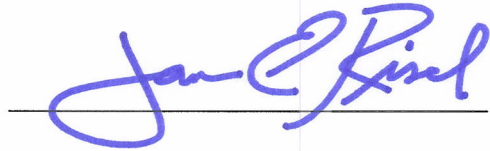
It is precisely because we value France's role internationally that we believe our two governments should work together to examine the implications of a sale of inherently destabilizing heavy military equipment to Russia. We fear this sale sends Russia the message that France acquiesces to its increasingly bellicose and lawless behavior.

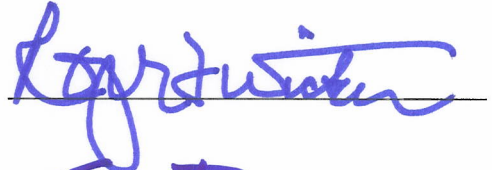
Thank you for consideration of our concerns.

Sincerely,

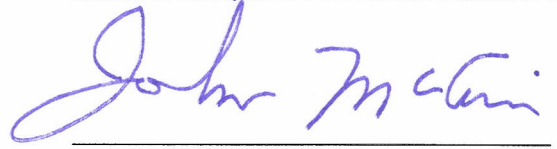












Cc: The Honorable Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State