

RECORD OF PART OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC AT CHEQUERS DURING THE LATE AFTERNOON OF FRIDAY, 16 NOVEMBER 1973

Present: Prime Minister M. Pompidou
Sir M. Palliser M. Andronikof

Defence

The Prime Minister asked whether President Pompidou expected defence to be one of the subjects for discussion at the forthcoming Copenhagen summit meeting. It was clear that the development of political co-operation would lead to the consideration of European defence questions. He raised this question especially in the context of whatever assessment the President made of current United States intentions, and especially whether the President thought that our differences with the United States over the Middle East would make large-scale withdrawals of United States troops from Europe more likely. Did M. Pompidou expect the Congressional pressures on the United States Administration to increase and did he think that President Nixon would be more likely now to yield to such pressures? If the answer were in the affirmative, should not Europe be giving greater thought to its own defence? In any case, would it perhaps be preferable not to raise this matter at the summit?

President Pompidou said that this was a very big question: and a difficult one to answer. He thought it would be preferable not to raise the matter at Copenhagen. Some countries, for example Ireland, but also Denmark, which would be in the Chair, were scared of this question: and he would be surprised if the Danish Prime Minister, whoever he might be, would wish them to discuss it. Furthermore, M. Pompidou was inclined to take perhaps a slightly less pessimistic view of the likely United

States attitude - or at least to feel that it should not be approached simply in terms of the partial withdrawal of United States troops. Some withdrawals were inevitable, whether as a result of negotiations with the Russians or of pressures from Congress, or indeed because the Americans could claim that the Middle East crisis had demonstrated how effectively they could airlift troops or supplies. But unless the United States were governed by men who had become completely blind to United States interests, he did not believe that they could simply abandon Europe to Soviet influence, whether exercised directly, or indirectly through the neutralisation of Europe. The dangerous outcome that he saw from possible agreements between the United States and the Soviet Union was that they might see any future nuclear battlefield as limited to the soil of Europe. This was a greater danger than that the United States might become so disinterested in the fate of Europe as to be ready simply to abandon it to the Russians. From this situation, M. Pompidou drew slightly different conclusions from those apparently drawn by the Prime Minister. First, those European countries that were able to do so should increase their current defence effort. Secondly, the European countries should achieve what the French had achieved by leaving NATO; namely to keep a certain freedom of decision. This meant freedom to decide whether a conflict was really of concern to Europe and the Alliance or not, if only with the purpose of making our American allies also reflect seriously about it. The day would come when, if the Nine had built a solid and effective European union they would have to have their own European defence effort

and capability: this would of course have to be linked to that of the United States, but Europe should have its own "resistance capability". In this matter the German attitude was very important, since Germany was the most exposed of any of the European allies, in that she represented the potential battlefield in the first instance. She was thus the ~~most~~ concerned of any to ensure the maintenance of United States protection. But she was also in a sense more frightened than anyone else at the risk of nuclear weapons being used, including especially tactical nuclear weapons.

From all this President Pompidou concluded that it would be very difficult, indeed virtually impossible, to discuss these matters à neuf. And he remained of the view that the only general conclusion to be drawn in the defence field was that they should not decrease but should if possible increase their own efforts. In the last analysis all their forces strengthened each other mutually: an increase by one country was of benefit to all.

President Pompidou said that when France had begun to develop her policy of détente with the East and had withdrawn from NATO, the Russians had welcomed this because they thought that it would be harmful to the Alliance: the United States for their part had been displeased, but more for planning and logistic reasons. They saw it as creating a gap in the line and they wished to use French territory for their transport, communications and other logistics. Now, however, the situation was different. The Russians no doubt still welcomed any gaps in the Alliance structure. But the United States were more concerned to control the escalation of conflict and might perhaps be able to reach some

agreement with the Russians on that. M. Pompidou said that he thought there were a good many illusions in that field. War in Europe was different in nature from war between Israel and Egypt. It was simply incredible to imagine that it would be possible to control such a war, to allow it to go so far but no further. The Prime Minister said that it might be possible for the United States and the Soviet Union to conclude an agreement on the lines mentioned by M. Pompidou. Under the last agreement they had concluded they had undertaken not to risk nuclear conflict without consultation. But there had in fact been no consultation by the United States before they declared their nuclear alert in the Middle Eastern crisis, nor had the Russians consulted the United States before threatening to send troops to the Middle East. It did not therefore seem to him that the first test of this particular US/Soviet agreement had proved very convincing. M. Pompidou agreed. He did not believe in the "prior organisation of the scenario for drama".

The Prime Minister said that he took M. Pompidou's point that it would be difficult to discuss defence at the Copenhagen meeting, especially with the Danish Prime Minister in the Chair. A useful factor in all this was that the Nine had managed to agree on the policy to pursue in the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) and that they had all adhered to this agreement. This had been most valuable in enabling them to negotiate from a position of strength. He agreed that the member countries should seek to increase their security and their forces. But they would have to recognise that if the CSCE reached some kind of agreement, and if the United States and the Soviet Union decided, in the context of a MBFR Agreement, to reduce their

forces, it would make it very difficult for certain members of the Community to maintain their existing force levels, to say nothing of increasing them. As he understood it, various members of the German Cabinet took this view. President Pompidou agreed. He had no doubt that if he held a referendum in France, seeking popular approval for an increase in the defence budget, there would not be 10% of favourable votes. He also agreed with the Prime Minister's comment about the German Cabinet. German Ministers were tempted by the old social democratic notions of disarmament.

President Pompidou asked what view the Prime Minister took of the final phase of the CSCE. He himself took an unfavourable view of the idea that 30 or more Heads of State or Government should meet at the end. It would be too much like playing at being a Congress of Vienna. The Prime Minister said that he too viewed the prospect with disfavour. He had the impression that President Nixon had agreed with Mr. Brezhnev that there should be a meeting at summit level at the final stage. But the British Government had consistently maintained that they wished first to see the outcome of the conference and to decide in the light of it whether such a meeting of Heads of Government would be justified. If the only outcome of CSCE was an agreement to exchange postage stamps or mixed choirs it would be wholly inappropriate to hold such a meeting. It would simply run the risk of creating the illusion in public opinion that some new arrangements for the security of Europe had really been concluded.

The Prime Minister said that he would like to develop the question of European security a little further. He thought

that if they were to try to continue to persuade member countries to contribute to European defence they must find some means in the future of discussing these problems so as to enable countries such as Britain, France or Germany, who were contributing a large proportion of their GNP to defence, to exert some degree of influence over those countries whose contribution was very small. But he had certain hesitations in raising these questions with the President. In their previous discussions they had agreed that it was not appropriate to discuss these matters as yet. And his hesitancy flowed from the fact that he sometimes felt that, however he raised the matter, the French Government suspected that a means was being sought of bringing them back into NATO by the back door. He wished the President to know that this was not the case. He well understood the French point that they were in the Alliance but not in the Organisation. But as soon as they began to discuss European security the question at once arose of the form of such a discussion and the way in which it should be held. The President had rightly urged that they should devote increasing resources to defence. But this could be done more economically if they could make greater progress on common procurement and on the manufacture of arms within Europe rather than purchasing them from outside. But, to do this, some form of discussion was necessary amongst Community members and he would be glad to know whether M. Pompidou had any ideas about this. He noticed that M. Jobert had twice referred to this matter in recent speeches. Had he any ideas in the matter?

President Pompidou said that at present he thought a distinction could be drawn between the use of armed force on the one hand and, on the other, the question of the organisation of defence or the co-ordination of means of defence. Discussion of the latter was a little premature. This was both because France was still somewhat behind the United Kingdom and because others were still further behind and were therefore afraid of what might happen. But of course there could be agreement on arms procurement. However, they had to recognise that, as long as the United States maintained troops in Europe, they would insist that the Europeans, and especially the Germans, should pay for them: and the simplest way of doing this was to buy arms from the United States. This therefore limited the scope for European action in this field, though it might be possible that something could be done "on the margin". However, the Prime Minister had also spoken of the economic development of resources. Clearly the advantage of the system the Prime Minister had proposed was self-evident in the context of the balance of payments. But so far as the cost of arms was concerned it was clear that European collaboration was always more expensive than as if the arms were bought off the shelf from the United States. In the latter case the cost had already been largely amortized by the American armed forces. Clearly countries such as Britain or France who possessed an armaments industry had an interest in producing arms, whether co-operatively or on their own. But other countries always found it cheaper to buy, for example, their aircraft in the United States - and he took the example of aircraft as perhaps the most characteristic. If they were to think in terms of making a single weapons system

- e.g. a tank, and of a common programme for its production then they must accept the need from the outset to avoid mistakes such as those made recently, in particular with the Germans. There was no point in each country concerned producing a prototype since inevitably each country would then wish to continue to operate its own project. There had to be a single project leader from the beginning. Britain and France had co-operated to make the Jaguar and he knew that the French Air Force was well satisfied with it. But its production had entailed the cost of meeting both RAF and FAF requirements and in consequence it had cost more to make the aircraft jointly than as if each country had built it separately to its own specifications. Clearly a co-operative venture had better sales prospects. He believed that Lord Carrington was in Paris that very day and would no doubt be discussing these matters. But he felt that difficulties in the arms field were likely to arise. Moreover, while he had no desire to exclude anyone from participating in joint projects, he thought that German freedom of manoeuvre in this field would be considerably less than that of Britain or France, since the Germans had to pay for the American forces stationed in Germany.

The Prime Minister said that he wished to raise one particular question in the arms field. He had told the President at their previous meeting that the British Government were reviewing the development of their nuclear weapons systems and analysing the future prospects and the time phasing in relation to French developments in the same area. The British analysis was leading them to the conclusion that they should continue with the development of the British elements in our nuclear weapons system. This would make it possible, if the

two Governments so desired, for France and Britain to co-operate at a later stage in the development of nuclear weapons. But of course this would depend on the view taken by M. Pompidou.

The Prime Minister asked whether M. Pompidou had had any recent opportunity of exploring American thinking about developments in the nuclear field. He knew, for example, that Dr. Kissinger had been in Paris earlier in the year. He understood that there was a school of thought within the United States Administration which not only accepted that France and Britain had their nuclear weapons systems but wished to see those systems remaining up-to-date and credible. These people took the view that it was unhealthy that only the United States and the Soviet Union should be major nuclear powers. He wondered whether M. Pompidou had any evidence of thinking on these lines in Washington.

M. Pompidou said that this was indeed what was said to the French Government. Dr. Kissinger, and indeed even President Nixon, had told the French Government that they well understood the position in this matter that General de Gaulle had taken. Nevertheless the question was still pretty theoretical. Moreover, the French Government had the impression that even if, in the last analysis, the United States recognised that they had to accept as a fait accompli the development of French and British nuclear power, they still hoped to use an argument that in effect took back with one hand what had been given with the other. In French discussions with the Americans, the latter accepted that the French nuclear weapons system might be adequate: but argued that its real effectiveness depended on adequate intelligence. In particular, if the French could not use the American early warning system they would be

wiped out before they could even lift a finger. President Pompidou added that he thought that they were in a period of uncertainty because the United States had recently discovered that the Russians had made enormous progress in the development of offensive weapons, particularly in multiple independently targeted re-entry vehicles (MIRV). He believed that this would oblige the Americans to rethink all their problems. The Europeans - or at any rate the French - could not do everything: they could not deploy both offensive and defensive systems. This was why France was concentrating-and would continue to concentrate - on what was called deterrence, which really meant the deployment of offensive weapons.

The Prime Minister asked whether the President could conceive of circumstances in which Britain and France, while retaining the right of independent action which they both now had, could co-operate with the United States on the basis that all three had equal access to all available information, in regard both to weapon development and to intelligence and early warning - or did the President rule this out?

President Pompidou said that so far as the present situation was concerned there had been little change from what he had said to the Prime Minister at their last meeting. The French programme ran until 1980. Thereafter he excluded nothing. What happened would depend first on Europe itself, then on the attitude of the United States and finally on what had happened meanwhile in respect of the Soviet threat. They had to recognise that the Russians were constantly talking peace to them, but meanwhile their military strength was increasing at an alarming rate. Premier Chou En Lai had expressed apprehension to him because there were 30 Soviet divisions

on the frontiers of China. He had replied that this was not particularly serious. There were many more Soviet divisions on the borders of Europe.

The Prime Minister said that France and Britain were two countries which at least agreed in their assessment of the Soviet threat.

The meeting then turned to other matters which are recorded separately.