

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

DATE: 1 March 1969

PLACE: Grand Trianon, Versailles

PRESENT: President Nixon
General De Gaulle
Mr. Andronikov
MG Walters

After the usual amenities the President said that he hoped that at the enlarged meeting trade and monetary matters could be taken up. He hoped that at this meeting the General would give his evaluation of the European countries and the future as well as his views on Vietnam. As he knew, there was new harrassment in Germany and the President would appreciate his views on any other subject General De Gaulle felt was appropriate. General De Gaulle said he was quite agreeable to proceed in this manner. The President said that his feeling in regard to Germany was that without being provocative or belligerent we must be firm in defending our access to Berlin because the action being taken had been directed by the Soviet Union and did not bear any relation to the holding of the election of the new Federal President there. The General said that the Soviets were concerned at the fact that the Germans were again becoming a real power on both sides of the Wall. They would not accept German rearmament. That would involve Germany again having real military power. The election of the Federal President of Germany was not in accord with the Statute of Berlin. The Allies were there as victorious powers and not the Federal Republic. For the Federal Republic this was a good opportunity as Germany is gaining political and military consistence. The Soviets had therefore seized this occasion of the election of the Federal President to manifest themselves. For the U.S., France and the U.K. it is a tough situation.

The President said that there was no doubt that under the Statute of Berlin we had the right to military access. General De Gaulle said that the French had no doubt on this. The four powers did have the right of military access to Berlin and the Soviets had not contested this.

The President then said he would like to hear the General's views on the future of Europe, the countries of Europe - Germany in particular - in the light of the effects of a possible detente between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. They had spoken previously of the effects on Western Europe and he wondered what the effect on Western Europe would be in regard to their will to defend themselves. What would be the effect on the Communist Parties of Europe, particularly in Italy where they were very strong.

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By Hm/kw NARA, Date 2/7/00

General De Gaulle said that as the President had seen in Brussels, London, Bonn, Berlin and Rome, there was no Europe. There might be someday but there was not at present. There are countries all more or less diminished. Two of them had been defeated and two had won victory with the U. S. but had suffered great loss of diminution. These were the U.K. and France. Two had been defeated, Germany and Italy. There were other countries such as Belgium and Holland which were respectable but did not carry real weight. These four countries were very different. They always had been and were now more than ever. They were different by language, different by customs, and this had been going on for centuries and even thousands of years. England was made for overseas trade. She faced out on the ocean. France and Germany were continental countries and though they had access to the sea, it was not organic to them as it was to the U.K. Italy was a peninsula in the Mediterranean isolated by the Alps. All are different but in what situation did they find themselves? U.K., France and Italy had regained their frontiers and had democratic regimes. But in fact they were lessened and felt this fact. The Germans who were the cause of all the misfortunes of WW I & II were in a special situation. They were cut in two and watched by the Soviets as well as by the Soviet Satellites, especially the Poles. They are in a situation of inferiority and lessened. Not economically but politically they were not really independent. They were obliged to ask for and accept a U.S. protectorate as they could not hold without it. This was not the case with France. She was not at the same level as when Versailles had been built. She had recovered her national reality. She did not need a protectorate though she was happy to have friends and if need be allies, but not a protectorate. Italy needed it less than Germany but she had to rely on the U.S. for arms and for her security. The U.K. could do without U.S. protectorate but for finance, trade and military reasons she felt she had to have a special policy to obtain preference from the U.S. This had been going on since Churchill. The British had been willing to accept being subordinate to the U.S. France, Italy, Germany and the U.K. were fundamentally different. We might regret this and wish it were otherwise. It's a pity they cannot be put together but this is not possible as they are too different -- their interests are too different and their situation relative to the U.S. is very different.

The General said he would then speak of the Atlantic Alliance and NATO. Though these countries were different in the light of the Soviet threat which had existed and still existed, they had the common interest of not wanting to be invaded by the Soviet Union which had enormous power now which it did not have before. That is why the Atlantic Alliance was natural. If Europe were attacked, the U.S. would stand with them. That was the Alliance and it was a good thing when it was done. So long as a Soviet threat exists and real detente was not achieved the Alliance must be maintained. It represented the commitment of the U.S. to Europe and of Europe to the U.S. that in case of a Soviet attack, all would stand together. This must be maintained. The General said he would then say a word about NATO.

NATO is in fact an integration under U. S. Command of the military forces of European countries. This is the real truth. Defense against the Soviets was programmed under U. S. command and if there were war, it would be fought under U. S. command. Such a commitment in advance meant in reality the acceptance of the idea of giving up a real national policy and national defense. Such a concept could be justified at a time when Russia was threatening European countries who were willing to accept anything in order to be defended by the U. S. At the time NATO was organized only the U. S. had nuclear weapons and thus it meant the defense of Europe by U. S. nuclear forces. All of this is now changed, first because the Soviet Union is less threatening. He could not say she would not again be so in the future. The countries of Europe and France in particular had recovered their national substance and some had even developed nuclear weapons. The U. S. was no longer the only country with nuclear weapons. The USSR also had them. The protection of Europe by the U. S. was no longer the same as in 1947 when NATO was first conceived. France was remaining in the Alliance as an ally of the U. S. She had said this at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis and on many other occasions. He would repeat it now, that if there was war, France would stand with the U. S. and while favorable and faithful to the Alliance, France did not want to stay in an integrated organization.

The General said that after giving his opinion concerning France, he would say a word about the others later. Integration to him was worth nothing. It was a sort of renunciation of defense. If there were a NATO war, the French would feel it was a U. S. and not a French war. The U. S. could do what it wanted and the French would be at their disposal. This would mean that there would be no national defense. France could^{not} subsist without a national policy and a national defense. If she did not have them, she would revert to a situation where she had 30 political parties. She would have no government and would be greatly weakened. She must have a national policy and a national defense. The best service France could render the Alliance would be to be herself. France with substance would be much more useful than a France who had non.

He would say a word about the other countries. What was true of France was not true for other European countries. It was not true for Germany which needed U. S. protectorate and it was natural for Germany to have it. He had told this to the Germans/hundred times. He had told it to Kiesinger who had perhaps reported it to President Nixon. The French had never suggested that the Germans should get out of NATO. Italy had good economic situation but it was not a strong country and it was normal for it to be under U. S. protectorate also. It was likewise natural for Belgium and the Netherlands to remain in NATO and he had never asked them to get out. The U. K., like France, could have chosen not to be in NATO while belonging to the Alliance

but not having its own national defense the British believed it was more practical to be under U.S. protectorate. They had developed atomic weapons with French help. This was not the case with France. For linguistic, commercial and monetary reasons British wished to remain attached to the U.S. He had never told them they should get out of the Alliance as had been alleged recently. The Alliance was natural and France remained in it but it was necessary for France to have a national policy and a national defense and not to be part of an integrated organization. The Germans were divided, Italy had no resources, and the United Kingdom had deliberately chosen to be second and subordinate to the U.S. The Benelux, the Scandinavians, the Greeks and the Turks need U.S. protection. For himself, he would say to the Atlantic Alliance, certainly, and to NATO, he would say no. For other countries who wished to belong to the Alliance France had no objection.

The President said that he thought he understood the General's position better than he had previously. Whatever the differences in their approach might be, he felt the best course was to proceed with the facts as they were. Under these circumstances he would like to urge that within the General's concepts the closest military consultation and such assistance as seemed appropriate under the independent position the General had enumerated could be rendered. Secondly, as he had told the French Defense Minister, he took a different view of the French nuclear deterrent. He thought it was good for the U.S. to have another power like France with a nuclear capability. Looking down the road to the future in nuclear matters and as European cooperation develops the French nuclear capability might well provide a base. The President hoped we could have an extension of military cooperation consistent with the French independent position.

General De Gaulle said that insofar as military relations were concerned, he had no objection to France having military relationships with the U.S., whose allies they were. What they did not like was that these relations were always proposed under a NATO guise. The French did not want NATO. They did not mind talking to the U.S. but did not want to do it through NATO. General Lemnitzer whom he greatly esteems was the head of NATO and when he asked why they did not have satisfactory relations (and we do have some relations), he is viewed by us as the American cloak for NATO. This they did not like. It was different with the U.S. with whom they had dealt before and he hoped they could do it again, but he would point out that there are some military relationships between France and the U.S.

The General felt that the Soviet threat to Europe would diminish because of China and this would increase even further if the U.S. and USSR reached a modus vivendi. Relations would change; the atmosphere would change; the situation of Europe was no longer the same. France, U.K., Germany, and in some measure Italy had recovered the military reality and he felt that this threat would continue. He felt that someday it might be possible to concert the policies of the countries of Western Europe and they might perhaps even do this with their defense arrangements. But this, while very possible, was not for today. It might be possible tomorrow. France had always favored this. This is why she had staged a reconciliation with Germany, and that had required a great effort for France; why France entertained good relations with Italy, and had hoped for a different relation with the U.K. but the latter had not helped. Little by little as the Soviet threat lessened or disappeared and the European States took substance, they might be able to get together. There was no Alsace Lorraine; there was no Schleswig Holstein; no colonial problems such as those which had divided Britain and France. It was very possible that these States might draw together and have a concerted policy and a concerted defense. The Atlantic Alliance itself could change and no longer simply be a U.S. protectorate over Europe.

The U.S. defense burden in Europe could be lightened and if war were unfortunately to occur in Europe, the U.S. and the Europeans would be in it together with all their forces. There would be no need of rigorous and immediate integration. The burden for the U.S. of maintaining forces in Germany and other countries and its heavy financial expenditures could, he believed and hoped, be lessened.

The President said that in regard to the present situation of the U.S. forces in NATO and in Germany, all German leaders had told him that any major reduction of the U.S. forces in Europe would be devastating for German morale. What did the General think at this time concerning the U.S. level of forces not so much in the light of a Soviet threat as in the effect of reductions on German morale?

General De Gaulle said that he had told the Germans and would repeat now to the President that he felt it was perfectly natural within the Alliance for the U.S. to maintain forces in Germany though he did not have any fixed view on the levels. Essentially, he felt that it was important that there be substantial U.S. forces in Germany because of the overall situation. If a detente with the East were to develop, the U.S. might find it possible to lower the level of its forces in Germany, but that was a U.S. affair not a French affair and they did not wish to mix in it. France maintained forces in Germany

and the Germans did not pay for them. They maintained these forces in Germany for the same reasons as the U.S. They might not stay there forever but presently the French would not withdraw them. It was important for the U.S. to keep more than symbolic forces in Germany. France believed this and the forces she kept there were second only to those of the U.S. and much more than those maintained in Germany^{by} the U.K.

The President said that if the General agreed they might talk for an hour on Sunday. He would like to have the General's views at that time on Vietnam and Southeast Asia. By that time the President would have been briefed by Lodge and his team. There was one other matter about which they might talk if time permitted. In 1963 when he had talked to the General, and he was talking privately now, not for public announcements that might embarrass the Soviet Union whether it might not be wise to develop lines of communications with the Soviets and the Chinese and so to speak not put all of our eggs in one basket. There was considerable sentiment in the U.S. State Dept, not only in favor of a Soviet-U.S. detente but also for a lineup of the Soviets, Europe and the U.S. against Chinese. His own view was that while this might be a good short-range policy, he felt that for the longer range it was more important to recognize that our interests might perhaps best be served by recognizing that China and the USSR were two great powers and it might be better to develop parallel relationships with them. This was of course in some measure largely theoretical as it was difficult to have relations with the Chinese.

General De Gaulle said that they could talk about Vietnam on Sunday but he would like to say a word now to tell the President something that he might wish to know before he saw Lodge and that we might perhaps not know. As the negotiations are taking place in Paris, the French have some relations with the Vietnamese, North and South, with the National Liberation Front not the Thieu-Ky government, that is to say with those who were fighting the United States. On the day before yesterday the Chief of the NLF Delegation in Paris, Mr. Tran Buu Kiem, had come to the Quai d'Orsay as he knew that General De Gaulle and President Nixon would talk about Vietnam. He said that if there was a renewed offensive by the North Vietnamese and the NLF in the South and against Saigon, it was because the Paris negotiations were not going well and therefore they had been obliged to step up their military action, but that if the Paris negotiations began moving they might act differently on the terrain in Vietnam. This was what General De Gaulle had wanted to say.

The President said that his position on Vietnam was that we were going to make every effort to bring the war to an end by negotiations consistent with a viable modus vivendi for both North and South Vietnam but that if the North

Vietnamese and the NLF do step up the attacks on the cities, he was not one to react lightly to such attacks. He believed that the war had to be ended one way or the other and would not do anything rash. But if we ran into a stone wall in the negotiations then another road might be appropriate. It took two as the General well knew to make peace. We were prepared to be very open minded in the negotiations. The best way to break the log jam might be to have private talks. The NLF and North Vietnamese did not like to do things in public. Whatever help France and the Soviet Union might give would be appreciated. Did the General believe that the Soviets were interested in helping end the war?

General De Gaulle said that he believed that the Soviets did not want it to go on as they did not know what might happen. It cost them a great deal of money as they furnished many things to the North Vietnamese and they had to do this by land, sea and air under difficult conditions and over great distances. They did not want the war to go on forever and he felt that the Soviets were sincere in their desire to see it end. Naturally, they wanted it to end in a manner in accord with their desires, that is to say that all foreigners evacuate Vietnam. They were obliged ideologically and politically to take this position and would hold to it. The war was convenient for their propaganda and made it possible for them to say that the U.S. wanted war and was oppressing people, etc. He was however convinced that the Soviets really wanted the war to end.

The President said that Kosygin had told him that the war in Vietnam cost the Soviet Union a lot of money. General De Gaulle commented that this was true.

General De Gaulle said that before they went to enlarged talks, he wondered if he might bring in the Prime Minister for a few minutes and he would say a few words about China.

The President said that this was agreeable to him and the Prime Minister joined the talks.

The President said that if General Walters would remind him, he would on Sunday say a few words about his decision on the matter of an anti-ballistic missile system. He would make his decision on Tuesday. He wished to speak of this matter in great confidence as the State Department did not know what his decision would be.

General De Gaulle then said that they had been talking about China. What about the possibility of relations with China and how would this affect relationships with the Soviets? Some said that one should try and play the Chinese off against the Soviets and try to divide them. Others felt that it was worth trying to improve relations with both. The French had relations with the Chinese and it had not brought them much advantage except perhaps economically and a

bit culturally, but mostly economically and in some cases some exchanges. They had some and might perhaps have more. The Chinese had great economic requirements and diplomatic relations facilitated economic relations. The French had renewed relations with China but had not expected much of it as the Chinese had appeared to be in a state of ebullition. The Cultural Revolution had been accompanied by great agitation and they had done nothing else except agitate. This was not satisfactory for political relations with them. They now appeared to be calming down and returning to a more normal situation. He believed that there was advantage in having relations with them. They were a huge entity and certainly had great resources. They were working and making progress in industry, in technology, in nuclear matters. They had ambitions and actions everywhere, even in Paris, in Africa and in Asia. As time passed they would have more political weight. What attitude should we adopt - that of isolating them and letting them cook in their own juice - of having no opening or contacts with them? He had no illusions but did not feel that we should isolate them in their own rage. We should have exchanges at all levels and we might eventually see the beginnings of a detente. How this would affect the Soviets was difficult to know. The Soviets usually recommended that one should have normal relations with the Chinese. They had such relations themselves even though these were not always easy. That, however, was their business. The West should try to get to know China, to have contacts and to penetrate it. We should try to get them to sit at the table with us and offer them openings. The French felt that this was the best policy and we could see what conclusions could be drawn. If the U.S. began to have relations with China this would mean that China would probably get into the UN. This would have much effect and a lot of dust would be stirred up but he did not believe that the overall results would be bad. The Prime Minister queried on this but the General agreed with him.

The President said that he had talked to Malraux on the previous evening. He had seen Mao on the eve of the Cultural Revolution and Mao had said that he had to stir up everything otherwise China would go to sleep.

The President said that as he saw it, there were two policies which might be followed, a short range policy and a long range policy. In the short range policy there could be no changes for a number of reasons relating to their impact on Asia. On a long range policy he felt that it would be detrimental to the interests of the U.S. in 10 years for it to appear that the West was ganging up with the Soviet Union against China. He felt that it was important for the French to extend their communications and keep a line open into China and in looking down the road towards talks with the Soviet Union we might keep an anchor to windward with respect to China. This did not mean that we would do anything so crude as to suggest we play China off against the Soviet Union. The Soviets would resent this bitterly. In 10 years when China had made significant nuclear progress we would have to have more communications than we had today.

General De Gaulle said that the French already had relations with the Chinese and it would be better for the U.S. to recognize China before they were obliged to do it by the growth of China. He felt that this would be better and that was why the French had chosen to do it earlier. General De Gaulle suggested that they might join the other members of their party and the Prime Minister said that they were already there and waiting.

General De Gaulle then wondered what they might talk about with the others.

The President said that it was probable that Secretary Rogers and Dr. Kissinger might like to hear the General's views on Europe and the Alliance and he would ask him to express them at the enlarged talks meeting and with this the talk concluded.