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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

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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

