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RECORD OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE
PRESIDENT OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC IN THE LONG GALLERY AT
CHEQUERS AFTER LUNCHEON ON FRIDAY 16 NOVEMBER 1973

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

The Middle East

President Pompidou was in a mood that blended pessimism with fatalism. He began the conversation by saying that he could not see how a peace settlement could be achieved; not least because so many of the Arabs were opposed to it. Yet a settlement was necessary to us all, both for political reasons and particularly because of the oil situation. We must therefore all be careful to do nothing to make it more difficult for the Americans to bring about a settlement - even if we had doubts about the likely success of their enterprise. M. Pompidou said that he had had a very discouraging talk with the Israeli Ambassador in Paris who had taken a pugnacious and intransigent line. The Ambassador had shown no disposition to accept M. Pompidou's argument that it was essential for Israel to seek to negotiate a settlement now along the lines of UN Resolution No. 242. ^{and that is} ~~if~~ she failed to do this, or if negotiations broke down in circumstances where the responsibility could be laid on Israel, it seemed to him that the Israelis were in fact committing themselves in the longer term to a policy of suicide.

The Prime Minister referred to his talk the previous week with the Israeli Prime Minister, after her meeting with the members of the Socialist International. She had clearly been disappointed by that meeting at which she had not succeeded in obtaining anything like general support for

Israel. Even the Austrians under Dr. Kreisky had been unwilling to commit themselves whole-heartedly.

In response to a question from M. Pompidou the Prime Minister gave ~~him~~ some impression of his talk with Mrs. Meir. She had clearly been in a grave state of concern about the fate of the Israeli prisoners of war, particularly those in Syrian hands. ~~She~~ He had listened to his views about the need for some form of buffer zones and an international force as a guarantee for peace. But she had rejected both concepts. She took the line that guarantees implied permanent insecurity. Either a peace agreement ensured security for the parties, in which case no international force was necessary: or, if it did not ensure such security, then Israel would have to ensure it for herself. President Pompidou commented that this was a short-sighted view. In any case it depended on the nature of the international force. Clearly if they were no more than a bunch of "customs officers" as seemed to be the case at present, then they probably would be of little use. But a real force, comprising fighting troops and ready if necessary to fight, under the control of the Security Council rather than of the Secretary General, might be a very different matter. He had observed that the Israelis have refused recently to allow members of the international force to carry out what they conceive to be their responsibility. He wondered whether this would have happened if the international force had made it plain that it was prepared to fight in order to carry out its task.

The Prime Minister said that Mrs. Meir was ready to accept direct negotiations and indeed was flexible about a possible intermediary. But she had refused to contemplate another Jarring-type exercise. Nor was she ready to agree to any initiative involving the four powers. She had said that in that situation three of the powers would always be against Israel. She had taken the line that she wanted to create a security situation between Israel and the Arabs no different from that prevailing in Europe. There were no buffer zones in Europe: why should there be in the Middle East?

President Pompidou commented that this was simply a mis-statement of history. There might be no buffer zones now in Europe but they had been a feature of European life for long periods. The German states had been at one time a buffer between ^{Russia} ~~Russia~~ and France: Belgium had been a buffer between France and the Netherlands. In any case Israel had to be clear that she could not expect to retain possession of occupied territory. How could she justify continuing to occupy Sinai - though there might be room for more argument about the Golan Heights.

M. Pompidou asked whether the Israeli Prime Minister had said anything about the nine power declaration of the previous week. The Prime Minister said that she had not referred to it.

M. Pompidou said that he viewed the situation with considerable despondency. Britain and France had traditional interests in the Mediterranean basin and traditional ties with the Arabs: and they both had a common interest in the problems of oil and energy supply generally. And he had come to the view that their position was the only one that

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could enable Israel to survive, if only their leaders could realise this. He had referred earlier to his remark to the Israeli Ambassador in Paris about the suicidal quality of Israeli policy. The Ambassador had replied that if he had to commit suicide he would prefer to do it in twenty years' time rather than now. But what was twenty years in the history of a nation, if national suicide were at stake?

President Pompidou asked whether the Prime Minister expected any change in the Israeli position after the elections due to take place at the end of December.

The Prime Minister said he found it difficult to judge. Some of his advisers took the view that the elections would in fact produce a move to the right in Israel and thus an even harder line. This was one of the reasons why, as M. Jobert knew, we had been urging Dr. Kissinger to carry on with the second stage of his proposals as quickly as possible; but nothing seemed to be happening at present.

M. Pompidou asked for the Prime Minister's assessment of American motives when they had declared their nuclear alert. Did he think that they really believed that there was a serious risk of conflict: was it more of a political move to exert pressure on a number of those involved: or was it for domestic reasons? The Prime Minister said that it was difficult to ^{justify} ~~quality~~ the decision on the basis of the message from Mr. Brezhnev.* The Americans had their hot line to Moscow

* It was not clear from M. Pompidou's expression, which remained totally blank, whether he knew the content of the message to which the Prime Minister was referring. I had a faint impression that he did not: but was not prepared to reveal that fact.

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and could easily have used it to reply to the Russians. On the other hand, if the Russians had been trying to force the Americans into seeking a cease-fire agreement then they had been successful.

The Prime Minister said that in this situation it was very important that the Arab States should feel that they could look to Britain and France for friendship and that they were not simply obliged to rely on the Soviet Union.

President Pompidou said that the American action in the matter of the alert had seemed to him to be less unreasonable than it had seemed to others. He has always taken it for granted that when a real crisis problem arose the United States would take the decisions. Admittedly they could have been a little more polite about it, but this would in no way have affected the substance. The Prime Minister agreed.

M. Pompidou said that the American position was overwhelmingly powerful. In that situation the question of "consultations" amongst allies was less a problem of courtesy or of worldly wisdom than one of political reality.

The Prime Minister said that he thought there was more to it than just that. It had never been possible to achieve agreement between Europe and the United States over the Middle East since the end of the Second World War. On this occasion the Americans seemed to have acted in the belief that the Europeans should simply accept their Middle Eastern policy and thus their action in calling the alert, in view of their feeling that the solidarity of the Alliance as a whole was at issue. They took the line that they had to support Israel. If the Russians supported the Arabs, then it was incumbent on the

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Europeans also to support Israel. But this was a very dangerous situation for the Europeans. The United States only drew 6 per cent of their oil supplies from the Middle East. European interests there were in infinitely greater danger.

President Pompidou said that he certainly agreed insofar as the oil situation was concerned. There was also the fact that United States policy was to reach understanding so far as possible with the Soviet Union, while at the same time seeking to base much of their policy on the principle of confrontation between themselves and the Russians. This led them to the conclusion that Europe must be ready both to accept whatever détente agreements they reached with the Russians and at the same time to align themselves with the United States against the Russians. In both cases this left Europe in the position of a satellite: and this was exactly the comment that Mr. Brezhnev had made to him.

Europe and East/West Relations

The Prime Minister said that this was why he thought that the next step should be for the Nine to seek to formulate a common policy towards the relationship between the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe and the members of the Community. President Pompidou agreed. The Prime Minister said that this would enable them to bring home to the Nine as a whole the real position of the Soviet Union. This would no doubt present certain problems in regard to the Federal Republic and East Germany but it should also help to keep the Federal Republic integrated effectively within the Nine.

President Pompidou said (rather solemnly) that this was to their interest and to the interest of peace. But they should have no illusions. If one day there was some kind of fundamental trend ("Mouvement de fond") in Germany for reunification at any price, there would be a risk of everything breaking apart. This was of course no argument for not acting as the Prime Minister had suggested: on the contrary they should do so. He wished to make it clear that he was wholly confident in the determination of Herr Brandt to pursue his present policies - and indeed even more so in that of the present opposition in Germany. But he observed that the German Democratic Republic (DDR) was already adopting a very dangerous position. They argued that the Federal Republic had treacherously abandoned the concept of the German Reich and wished to integrate Germany into some kind of "European jelly". The DDR, they argued, represented the real Germany. But if they persisted in this argument, what might happen in a crisis? He

repeated that he did not suspect the Chancellor or his Party. But there was a "German reality" which could bestir itself one day and would take no account whatever of what had been decided by any Government. France and Britain were fortunate enough to be very old nation states living within well defined frontiers with no particular ambitions or desires. The German reality was uncertain. Once again he had no mistrust of Herr Brandt - and M. Pompidou repeated the words "bien au contraire" twice. But Herr Brandt was not eternal. It was salutary to remember that only ten years had separated Herr Stresemann from Adolf Hitler.

The conversation ended at 3.20 p.m.