

February 24, 1970

Memorandum of Conversation, Nixon and Pompidou

Citation:

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Summary:

Minutes of a conversation between President Nixon and President Pompidou during the latter's visit to the United States. Nixon states that he wants there to be good relations between the U.S. and France because, despite differences in approach, both countries share the same goals. The two countries were allies and should find common grounds for cooperation even though France wanted to maintain its independence from NATO. Pompidou points out differences with the U.S. in terms of military and nuclear capabilities, and Nixon recognizes the highly secretive nature of such talks which might lead to a better military cooperation between both countries. Next, they discussed how the Soviet Union presented problems for both countries, and that the Soviets must not be allowed to gain an advantage because of any agreements between France and the U.S. It concludes with an overview of the state of affairs with China, the U.S., and an independent France in a world that is progressing forward at a rapid pace since the end of the last war.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PLACE: The President's Office
 DATE: February 24, 1970
 TIME: 10:30 a.m.
 PARTICIPANTS: The President, President Pompidou
 Mr. Andronikof, Maj. General Vernon Walters

The President opened the conversation by saying that if President Pompidou agreed he felt they would have two opportunities apart from the dinner talks to discuss various matters. He understood that even during dinner it would be possible for them to have informal discussions. The President stated that he had no specific agenda and they could discuss any matters that were of interest to both. They could start the conversation today and go forward with this kind of talk. The President felt that discussions with only the two of them and the interpreters present were more useful than larger meetings where people tended to speak for the record. In small meetings he suggested that it was possible to speak quite freely.

President Pompidou agreed that this was a better system if they could speak more freely and more openly.

President Nixon said that it was important, as pointed out by President Pompidou that our two countries have a long history of alliance and friendship in the modern world. Prior to his visit to General De Gaulle last year there had arisen an idea that perhaps the interests of France and the United States were irreconcilably opposed. He did not agree with this. It is possible for two great nations with the same goals to decide to adopt different methods of achieving their goals. He had begun in his administration to develop a new spirit of Franco-American relations of respect for different points of view and of not insisting that both pursue the same road to arrive at their common goals. Therefore he was prepared for any subject President Pompidou might wish to discuss, including the question of the future of Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, East-West relations. But what was really important is that they have a good exchange of views so that they could learn from the other.

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President Pompidou said he agreed with this. He was grateful to President Nixon for this new policy. A country like France cherished its independence. There were substantial differences in the available means of military and economic power to the United States and to France; there was tradition involved as well, and this was important to all countries in Western Europe and France in particular. He believed that we must necessarily be united on substance. This did not mean that we must agree on each special situation which sometimes we see with eyes that are not quite the same. The two countries did not have the same geography nor did they have the same economic and military means. He felt it was important at the outset to be frank with one another, to inform one another clearly, to seek significant means of working together and to avoid opposing one another, without necessarily having identical views.

President Nixon then said he felt the future of Europe was a particular case in point, and he noted that President Pompidou felt strongly that France was a part of the alliance but at the same time should maintain an independent position. In his view they should explore in what areas France and the United States while maintaining their independent positions could cooperate on matters of military cooperation. He was not suggesting any change in France's position toward the Atlantic Alliance. He had no reason to question this new policy but he felt that the United States and France should recognize that they were allies and, to the extent they could, find areas of cooperation.

President Pompidou said that he agreed with this and they welcomed on their part discussion of this issue.

President Nixon said that our military and General Wheeler had told him of the great respect we have for the French military and of the consultations which are held between them. We would want to proceed with these in any way which is consistent with President Pompidou's position.

President Pompidou said that he believed that when General De Gaulle withdrew the French forces from the integrated NATO command what was probably the most shocking to the U. S. was that this decision required the removal of NATO installations from French soil. In his view it was possible for allies to have a number of arrangements, staff contacts, advance planning without the need

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of placing their forces under integrated and central command. He believed that NATO was probably the first instance in modern military history. He felt that this was probably due to the immense differences of force in modern weapons between the partners. Like President Nixon he was quite ready to see where they could coordinate eventual actions and closer contacts between the respective staffs without modifying their basic position. But he felt that they could talk quite significantly. He understood that this part of the discussion would be entirely confidential now and later.

President Nixon replied that he would first like to say that he agreed that what they said in confidence would be held in confidence now and for the future. Perhaps the best procedure in this case might be to let their military people explore what was feasible from a military standpoint and they could then submit their views for consideration. There would be no commitments but only an opportunity to examine what could be done. Generally speaking the military were closer now concerning these matters than political people. In discussing such things as joint targeting he was not himself technically competent and he felt that, if the President agreed, their military could get together and have a discussion and planning on a bilateral basis. This did not involve a change in France's position towards NATO.

President Pompidou said he understood this and he believed that at the present time under the Lemnitzer-Ailleret agreements there were discussions concerning the French divisions in Germany. He felt that this could now be extended and broadened to cover the French divisions that were stationed in France and not be limited to those in Germany. In the Mediterranean, which was a particular hot spot right now, there could be talks and discussions between the two navies. Generally the sailors were closer together than others and this could be developed. In the nuclear area there was not a great deal you could say or do for the very good reason that the French strategic capabilities were very weak at the present time. But they would develop across the years. Such targets as the French might have were probably already targeted by the United States, and, in any case, the U.S. would probably continue to target them, since the French were not sure that their means were sufficient to penetrate and reach these targets. Perhaps the situation would be different when the French had their nuclear missile submarines and also when, in two or three years, they have tactical nuclear weapons. This, however, will bring up a serious and immediate problem. Then there was the question of weaponry, that is research and

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development. There were a certain number of agreements between France and the United States under which a steering committee existed for development in this area. It had more or less been put to sleep. He felt that this might be more difficult because the US had a system of zones and the French felt they could not let themselves be limited to one particular area. He felt that at least something should be done to establish a basis of recognition so that the U. S. navy subs and French submarines when they meet could recognize one another and be in direct contact.

President Nixon said that if out of their talks--which would be held on a completely confidential basis because he realized that political overtones involved both of them--they could allow their military people to explore ways in which they could cooperate better, this would be very useful. We had started a certain distance down this road and we could go quite a distance further. As the French acquired tactical nuclear weapons and increased their strategic capability by the construction of their submarines the nuclear question could come up again and could be a subject of talks on cooperation. If we could give a type of direction, a blessing to the military men to discuss these matters he felt this could be useful, and he emphasized that this could be done in an independent manner without giving up freedom of decision. He felt it was important and desirable between allies to find positions of common action on given assumptions.

President Nixon said that he understood that the political decision as to the use of force was reserved to the President. What he was speaking about was tactical cooperation that might come into play once political decisions were made. The political decisions however would be reserved to President Pompidou and to himself. He felt that in case of a conflict it was more likely than unlikely that both would be involved--that both France and the United States would be involved. Eventually, what he was talking about was contingency planning. He respected and understood the decision of France to retain her independence. The basic point is to realize that the Soviet leaders' goal is still expansion but they are not prepared to take the risks their predecessors did. For France and for the U. S. the main goal was defense, not expansion. This does not mean that the U. S. and France should sit in isolation and look at the Soviet Union as an implacable enemy. In the discussions both may have with the Soviet Union we should recognize that their purpose is to gain an advantage over us to serve their own ends. Progress to them is not an end in itself. What we really need, as President Nixon had said

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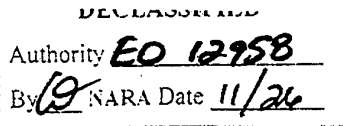
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to his colleagues, was a healthy dose of French skepticism or cynicism in dealing with the Soviet Union. The President said we should not approach discussions with the Soviets in a state of euphoria and believe that all we have to do is to sit down at a table and all our difficulties will evaporate. Our differences with them are deep and real. We should attempt to resolve them without an ultimate confrontation.

The President noted with regard to the arms talks, in the last few years the Soviet Union has been increasing in significant numbers its forces in submarines and in ICBM's. They are also building an ABM system. The present balance of such missiles is that in ground-based missiles they are at parity with us or may even be a little ahead. We are still ahead in sea-launched missiles but by 1974 or 1975 they will be equal. That is why in these talks we must be careful not to make an agreement just for the sake of an agreement. We have to be very careful not to make an agreement that would leave the Soviet Union in possession of a substantial advantage.

The President went on to comment that we should not make an agreement that would in any way go over the heads of our European friends or one that would jeopardize our ability to join with our European allies in defense of freedom when we meet again with the Soviets in April. We approach the arms talks with great caution. President Nixon said we had a responsibility not to weaken the U. S. position in relation to the Soviets and not to say or do anything that would weaken or be in derogation of the European position. While he was in this office there would be no Soviet-American condominium, which would be dangerous, nor a coalition against the Chinese. He had spoken along these hard lines. This does not mean that we are not prepared to explore with the Soviet Union those areas where we can agree in realistic terms to make progress. Above all, we must remember what it is that has deterred the Soviet Union in Europe. It has been the strength of the Alliance and of the United States. Despite our budgetary problems and political problems he would exert all the leadership he could to see that the U. S. plays its role and that there is no lessening of our strength that would encourage a more expansionist and aggressive policy by the Soviet leaders. President Nixon believed that it was both practical and pragmatic to give them reason to decide to live and let live.

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This, President Nixon said, brought him to the subject of China. As President Pompidou had noted we had made some moves towards China at Warsaw and had also taken some initiatives concerning trade. These had not been reciprocated up to this point. The purpose of these moves on our part was long-range. It would be easy for us to fall into error that France, U.S. or the Atlantic Nations should join with the Soviet Union in a Complex of Nations to contain China. In the end this would only serve to build up in 15, 20 or 25 years a nation of a billion people and make it an implacable enemy of all our nations. President Nixon therefore believed that it was important that we try to develop lines of communication with the Soviet Union and China rather than to join one to contain the other. Over a long period perhaps a generation we will see a gradual change in the Soviet attitude and in the Chinese attitude. There will be a change in their situation and in the world and they will have to face that change. In the meantime it is important for the U.S. and the Free World to maintain their strength and to negotiate. We should have discussions whenever possible but we should negotiate with our eyes open. We should have no illusions concerning the deep differences we have with them. These cannot be resolved by a conference or by a treaty. In this spirit we have agreed to negotiate with the Soviets.

Turning to France, the President said he wished to emphasize again that--as distinguished from the positions of some of his predecessors in this office--he would not comment on the independent French policy. He might have his own views but he felt that a strong independent France devoted to the same goals as we are is in the interest of the U.S. A strong Europe in the economic sense might seem not to be in the U.S. interest, in the long term it was. What we need is a better balance in the West. It is not healthy to have just two superpowers; in such a situation there is more chance of a conflict than when there are more centers of power. Greater strength of the European economies, an independent French policy, and, in Asia, a stronger Japan, would eventually make for a more stable world. The position of the U.S. at the end of World War II was not healthy. Twenty-five years had passed and things were changed. This we regarded as a healthy development.

In the final analysis with three billion people on earth if civilization is to survive in the last third of this century this will be decided by the Soviet Union, by China, and eventually Japan, by Western Europe, by that he meant France, Britain and Germany and the United States. Africa is moving along, but it is a century away.

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Latin America is also moving but it is fifty years or more away. In Asia, India and Pakistan will have enormous difficulty in simply keeping pace with their increase in population. We have a great responsibility to use the power we have to build the kind of a world that keeps the forces of expansion in check and thus give the forces of freedom a chance to grow in their own way and not like tin soldiers lined up behind the biggest one.

President Nixon said he must ask President Pompidou's pardon for talking so long but they would be talking together over the next few years and he felt that President Pompidou should know his basic thoughts. He would be interested in knowing how President Pompidou evaluated these matters.

President Pompidou said that a talk was never too long when it was interesting. He completely agreed with all that part of the President's analysis that it was safer to have different centers of power to avoid the conflict of two blocs. At the end of the war the U.S. was in a position to establish its domination over the whole world. It had not used its power to do so. Power thus established never lasts long. The existence of more centers of economic and political power makes things more complicated but in the longer term has greater advantages.

President Nixon agreed.

With respect to China, President Pompidou said he could entirely approve our policy. It would be wrong to form a bloc with the Soviet Union against China. Long term it would be folly. The road with China would be long and there were many obstacles. But the time was good for initiatives as China was fearful of Soviet actions.

With respect to the Soviet Union President Pompidou said he would like to make some shades of opinion in the analysis. Like President Nixon he felt that if the Soviet leaders believed they could conquer Europe without major obstacles they would do it at once. They know that they no longer can. First they are haunted by the Chinese problem. Even if they decided to use military force there is the impossibility of conquering China and if the immense masses of China wished to expand they could do so only on Soviet territory. This is therefore a long-term concern for the Soviet leaders. But it is a temptation as they fear the Chinese nuclear capability and the economic

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burden of maintaining a large army in the Far East so far from their vital centers such as Moscow. They want quiet in the West. They want to try to avoid an arms race with the U.S. that would cost them too much. They want an agreement with the West that would support the status quo perpetually. They have economic difficulties. Brezhnev realizes that they are far behind the free world. This creates an inferiority complex and the desire to use Western technical capabilities

President Pompidou observed that this is even more accentuated in the satellite countries who want to develop economically and cannot obtain from the Soviet Union the means to do this. These means exist in the West, especially in Germany. Thus their desire for closer relations with the West is not sentimental but a political, military and economic reality profoundly felt by the Soviet leaders. President Pompidou said he had been to the Soviet Union as Prime Minister and he had seen that the generation behind those now in power was a generation of engineers, technicians, technocrats fascinated by the West and more particularly the United States. We should not forget that the economic and technical development of the Soviet Union by the West is a tradition. President Pompidou referred to Soviet fear of Germany, noting that if one looked at Germany today, despite its economic power, one wonders how the Russians can have such fears. But one must recall that 25 years ago the German armies were in the Caucasus, on the Volga and before Leningrad. It took the U.S. the USSR and many others to defeat the Germans. Therefore there was this Soviet urge to try to neutralize Germany and perpetuate its division, and in conversations with us to find means to ensure this neutralization.

To conclude, President Pompidou said he would say two things. First there was the question of more contacts with the east. He believed freedom was contagious. Bismarck once said that the Germans had given the French the republic like syphilis. Freedom was contagious and contacts with the Soviets and satellites would raise the need to shake the yoke of a totalitarian regime. When in Moscow the young newspapermen with him had contacts with their Soviet counterparts that had nothing to do with communism. Mostly the satellite countries that most thirst after independence like the Romanians are the most anxious for the European Security Conference. They want to sit around the table with other countries and not be represented by the Soviet Union in a U.S.-USSR tete-a-tete. President Pompidou said he was looking forward to the opportunity of talking further with President Nixon.

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Both leaders agreed to the establishment of a teletype circuit between the White House and the Elysee Palace. A future communications link between the two Presidents would be established in this manner through the diplomatic advisor to the President (currently George Gaucher) and Kissinger.

Dr. Kissinger then entered and the meeting concluded.

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