

Memorandum of Conversation

Place General de Gaulle's office in the Elysee Palace, Paris

Date: 28 March 1969
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Present The President
 General De Gaulle
 Mr. Andronikov
 MG Walters

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2/7/69

After expressing his satisfaction at the president's visit General de Gaulle said that he was entirely at the President's disposal to discuss anything he wished.

The President thanked him and said that he hoped that they would be able to discuss the whole range of East West problems, then they might discuss such matters as the Middle East, Viet Nam and economic matters even though a great deal of the latter were purely technical.

The President said that one of his major concerns was that as a new president in any talks which we may have with the Soviet Union he wanted to be sure that the position which the United States takes is the best one to achieve our common objectives. He would like to have the General's advice and suggestions as to what talks the US should have with the Soviet Union and his views on what other initiatives should be taken in this regard by the new administration. He would also like to talk about bilateral matters of interest to France and the United States on which they might take some action. He would also appreciate the General's evaluation of the situation in Eastern Europe after the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet declaration concerning Sovereignty over the other countries of Eastern Europe. He would also like to know the General's evaluation on China. What policy did he feel was most adapted to the requirements of the situation. He hopes that the General would talk to him frankly and directly. His purpose was not to talk for any public declaration and what would be said would not be put on the normal diplomatic circuit. General de Gaulle said that the President could count on him for this. He would certainly maintain the matters discussed in close confidence. The President said that he would appreciate the General's personal advice.

General de Gaulle recalled that he had already discussed some of these matters with the President in 1967. He felt that we must realize that there was Russia and there was Communism and that they were not always the same thing. France did not want Communism. He did not feel that the communists were advancing any longer. Certainly they were no longer advancing in France and in Italy, certainly not in Germany, not in Poland Hungary and Czechoslovakia, not even in the USSR. He did not think that the danger of communism was over, it may last many years still but it can no longer conquer the world. It is too late for that. The dynamic is gone.

Russia said the General is a vast country with a long history with great resources, pride and ambitions which are not necessarily communist. It is a fact that it is a country which suffered greatly during the war which they feel that they won and there is some truth in this. It was the Russian Army that broke the back of the German Army. Russia is a country filled with ambitious resources and drive. With difficulty they have made progress and they are aware of this. If the President could place himself in the position of the Soviet leaders he would find that his principal concern for tomorrow would be China. This is an enormous country which has a common frontier thousands of miles long with Russia. The Chinese have always detested the Russians and probably detest them more now than at any other time in the past.

Chinese ambitions are directed mainly against Russia, against Manchuria, Siberia and Central Asia. The Russians know this and China is their main preoccupation. With Communism stopped this becomes even more important. They see their relationship with the West and with the U.S. in the light of the problems they expect to have with China tomorrow. They are thinking in terms of a possible clash with China tomorrow. They cannot face both China and the West (the US in particular) at the same time. Thus he believed that with prudence and with some steps forwards and some backwards they may well opt for a policy of rapprochement with the West. When he said rapprochement he did not mean that he expected that the Russians would enter into full trust and confidence with the west but that they would like in the light of their growing quarrel with China to be sure that the West would not act against their back. They know that you and they are rivals, but they might want an arrangement, as sort of modus vivendi that would ensure that they would not be attacked in the back. This was true for their relations with the US, with the West and with Germany. They had always suffered greatly at the hands of the Germans but more particularly during the Second World War. The Germans had done terrible things in Russia, they had gone all the way to the Caucasus and had almost overthrown the Soviets. The Russians have not forgot this and a perpetual concern of theirs was the thought that if they one day have trouble with China they do not want the Germans to be able to harm them or to drag the West against them. This is an idee fixe of their policy.

The President said he would like to ask whether the General felt that the Russians also had as a goal a modus vivendi with the US while tightening their control over the peoples of Eastern Europe so as to weaken the will of the peoples of Western Europe to build up their defenses. Some of the people to whom the President had talked believed that while the Russians were willing to meet with the US to secure a detente, it was partly because of the fear of China which the general had described but also because one of their major objectives was to consolidate their hold over the peoples of the countries of Eastern Europe and induce the peoples of Western Europe to lessen their defensive efforts.

General De Gaulle said that the Russians would of course be delighted if the countries of the West and the US were to diminish their defense efforts as thus their relative power would be greater but he did not think that the Russians intended to "march West". They knew that this would lead to a general war. The US might not react at once with all its means but such a move would inevitably to General War and he did not believe that the Soviets wanted this. Their leaders know that they could not win such a war. He repeated that he did not believe that they wanted to march west. They would certainly like it if the US and the Western countries were to become weaker but that would still not induce them to move in Europe. It is too late for that. The Soviets do not want their satellites to leave them. They want to maintain the power over Poland, East Germany, Hungary Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria and if possible over Rumania. It is already too late for them to do this in the case of Yugoslavia. They had occupied Czechoslovakia because they were afraid that the Czechs would leave them and "go elsewhere". They would not let themselves be weakened in the west but they had given up the idea of conquering the west. They might some day make a move at Berlin but this is a small affair. With their growing concern about China he felt that they were sincere in their desire for a detente with the West. When the French had made the first move in this direction, despite the fact that they had made no political concessions to the Soviets they had been treated with great politeness and amiability. When the US arrived at some arrangement with the USSR on Strategic Missiles or ABM's they would also be amiable to the US. Nikita Khrushchev had wanted to this but he had not been able to do it, nor had the US, Vietnam had arisen. General de Gaulle felt that working towards a detente was a good idea, in fact if the US was not prepared to go to War or to break down the Wall then there was no alternative policy that was acceptable.

To work towards a detente was a matter of good sense. The US should take all precautions even as the French had in talking to them it was good sense if you were not ready to make war to make peace. He felt that the Soviets were not strong enough to enlarge their conquests and in view of their fear of China they might well be disposed towards a detente with the West and the US in particular. They had already moved in this direction in coming to an agreement with the US on the non proliferation treaty.

The President then asked whether the General believed that the Russians consider the American nuclear deterrent as credible. The balance of power in the world had changed markedly since 1962 when President Kennedy with the much appreciated support of General de Gaulle had stood firm in the Cuban crisis, At that time the US had a superiority in strategic missiles on the order of five to one, not just in number but in capability of first and second strikes. Since that time the Soviet Union had made remarkable progress in the field of missiles and though the US might still be slightly ahead there was a rough parity in strategic arms. In conventional forces the advantage enjoyed by the forces of the Warsaw pact had also been significantly increased in relation to the West including France. As things now stood they were way ahead in conventional forces. Some had suggested that if the Russians tried to move politically and diplomatically, the president was inclined to agree with General de Gaulle that they would not march on the Rhine. General de Gaulle interjected "except possible at Berlin". The President continued saying that if the Russians moved did the Russians believe that the US would react with strategic weapons, did the Europeans have confidence that the US would move in answer to ~~xxxxx~~ an attack or the threat of an attack by massive conventional ground forces.

General de Gaulle said he could answer for the French not the Europeans as Europe was made up of all sorts of people. He felt that the French believed that the Russians knew that if they moved west they would have an initial advantage in conventional arms the knew that the US would eventually, if not immediately, at least after a certain time be obliged to commit atomic weapons. The Russians knew that the US could not accept or allow the Russians to conquer Europe for that would also mean the conquest of Africa and the isolation of the United States on the American continent. Though they might have initial success with tactical weapons they knew that it would not stop there and that the US would eventually have to use all of its power and destroy the USSR. The USSR of course also had the power to destroy the US. He did not believe that the Russian wanted everybody to be dead, themselves included. It was not natural for living beings to harbor such ideas. The death of everyone was not a policy. Europeans and French believed that if the Russians marched the US would not use nuclear weapons right away as this would imply a total effort of each side to kill the other who could also kill you. It would take time and if this was true the situation of Europe would indeed be tragic. If the US were to use tactical nuclear weapons and the Soviets also Europe would be destroyed. Western Europe and the UK by Soviet tactical weapons and East Germany, Poland Czechoslovakia and Hungary would be destroyed by US tactical weapons and meanwhile the USSR and the US would not really be harmed. He was sure that neither side wanted the common death as this was not a policy, If this was so then we must do something else as Cold War prepared Hot War A situation in which blocs always opposed one another led nowhere and prevented progress and even liberty. In a world of detente liberty would be the gainer, it would gain points in Poland Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Such a process had already started in Czechoslovakia and might even spread to Russia. That is why he felt that with all precautions the west should move in the direction of a detente that would benefit the Eastern Europeans.

The President then asked how it was that if Freedom gained in an atmosphere of detente that the Russians would be willing to go along. Would they do so because their primary fear is China ?

Would they be willing to take the risk that detente would weaken their hold on their Eastern European neighbors ?

General de Gaulle then said that he had pointed out that there was communism and Russia and even if Communism did not want this Russia might. A detente meant relations, contacts, trips, movement of papers and goods, exchanges of states of mind. One could try and see if one could get together in difficult matters. What the Soviets had done to try and regain their hold in Eastern Europe was because they felt weakened. The Czechs were certainly not in the same state of mind as they were ten years ago. He was not speaking of their unfortunate leaders or their wretched papers but the Czechs were much closer to us than they were ten years ago. Contacts and exchanges led to hope, hope reappeared. He had travelled in Eastern Europe last year in Poland and he had been struck by the warmth with which he had been received by the people. In Romania he had received a similar impression, there was of course an element of curiosity to see General de Gaulle and so forth but there was also a desire to get out of the straitjacket in which they found themselves. He had felt this even in the USSR itself. They remain men no matter how much they are painted over with ideology. They are still men. The trend towards freedom and dignity is not dead and it can develop in an atmosphere of detente. This was not possible in tensions such that people felt that they were at the edge of war. What he had said was philosophy but it was also practical. What else could be done, if one did not want to make war there was nothing else to do except to do nothing at all and that was always the words possible policy.

The President said that he would like to indicate his reasons for announcing his policy up to this point. When he was inaugurated six weeks ago if he had announced that on the next day he was going to meet Kosygin and Brezhnev at the summit, the US press and the world would have applauded and said that now progress was really being made. He had not done this because he felt it was necessary to have very careful planning for a meeting at the summit, there had been the spirit of Glassboro, of Vienna and of Camp David and these hopes had been dashed. It was different when we were meeting with our friends and people who were basically like us. He felt that it would be a mistake for the President of the United States to go to a meeting without knowing what we were going to talk about or where we were going. This would simply raise hopes that would subsequently be dashed. Consequently he believed that we should have talks first with our friends and allies including France. The Soviets had interest in talks on the limitation of strategic weapons. This was a matter that could affect the capability of the US forces in Europe. Another reason for not rushing into arms talks was that it was generally claimed that an arms race increased the risk of war. He thought it was clear that both the USSR and the US would like to reduce the financial burden on themselves. He wished to make clear that on this matter he would not make the decision in this matter on a financial basis, the US had to be able to afford whatever security required. One had to recognize a historic fact that wars also were caused by political tensions. If a freeze on strategic arms were to take place an explosion could still occur in the Middle East at Berlin or in Vietnam and this could lead to war. He felt that this opportunity should be seized by the new administration and he shared the General's view that detente was desirable. However we should be hard and pragmatic in dealing with the Soviets. They knew what they wanted and we must know what we want. While we would not make talks on the Middle East and other matters a condition for talks on limitation of strategic weapons, we did feel that it was proper to suggest at Ambassadorial level as indeed we had that we felt that we should try and make progress on all fronts to achieve a detente. We should talk in the UN in the framework of the Four Powers on the Middle East and discuss later what could be done there. We would like the Soviets help on solving the Vietnamese problem, we realized that their situation in this matter was delicate with the Chinese but the Soviets did have great influence on the North Vietnamese. After all 85 percent of their weapons came from the Soviet Union. Perhaps we could also make some progress

in the Central area on Berlin. Not of course a solution as neither side could give enough to settle the matter. We could perhaps make some progress. The President said he would like to know the General's opinion whether he thought we were correct in proceeding cautiously in asking the Soviets to talk on several areas rather than discussing only limitation of strategic weapons with them. The reason why the President was opposed to an agreement on Arms limitation only without progress on political issues such as the Middle East, Europe and Vietnam was because such an agreement would create a sort of euphoria of peace.

General De Gaulle said he felt that the President was quite right. A detente was the only acceptable policy. One must be cautious and not speak of everything at once, nor should one be overly polite and make concessions to them. The French who had started the policy of detente with them had never made any concessions even on Germany and they certainly had reasons to do so but had not. Now France was on much better terms with the Soviets and had made no concessions to them. Practically if the US were to start conversations on political subjects as well as on strategic missiles, ABM's and so forth and if contact could be made with them on other subjects such as Vietnam and the Middle East he felt that the US could do this with all prudence and dignity. He believed that the President should not rush to Moscow and lay out the red carpet before Brezhnev but that the President was quite right in seeking to have adequate preparations made in advance.

The President then said that the question of the Middle East following the French initiative preliminary talks were taking place between the Four Powers. What did the General feel concerning the question of parallel talks between the US and the USSR bilaterally providing always for consultation within the Four while recognizing that any final settlement should be on the basis of the Four Powers rather than something arrived at bilaterally. This would be to the advantage of all concerned. The question in fact was broader. Sometimes we pay lip service to multi-lateral discussions in the UN, Four Powers etc but when interests of major powers are at stake progress cannot be achieved unless there are bilateral contacts to hammer out differences. The question therefore was did General De Gaulle approve the US having bilateral discussions at the same time as the Four were meeting at the UN.

General De Gaulle said that he felt that if the US entered on the only road to a settlement it was the path of an arrangement between the Four powers which could be implemented then it would be natural to have bilateral talks with the Soviets just as the French had bilateral talks with the Soviets and with the US. He felt that the Four Powers should show that they wanted to agree and were not in favor of indefinite negotiations. It would serve no useful purpose to have a meeting to tell Mr. Jarring to go on with his mission. Even before the 1967 conflict France had proposed Four power talks to tell both the Israelis and the Arabs that they should not attack and that the one who did would be blamed. Had we done that we might have prevented the Israeli attack. France and the US had agreed and the British naturally had done what the Americans wanted (touch of condescending sarcasm). The Russians had not agreed, they had thought that the Arabs were stronger than they really were and wanted an excuse to continue expanding their influence and sending arms to the Arabs. Now on the contrary the Soviets would like to see an end to the conflict and the US would also. This matter should be solved quickly, if it were not solved quickly the situation would grow worse. He felt that the Four should meet to see how the Security Council resolution of November 1967 could be implemented. This would involve the withdrawal of the Israelis to their original borders, Security for Israel and freedom of navigation for all including the Israelis in the Gulf of Aqaba and the Suez Canal and a return of the refugees insofar as this could be done. After that some arrangements could be made on the frontiers if the four powers agreed. If this was not done quickly then it would

never be done and the situation would constantly grow worse. The Israelis would become more and more imperialistic. Dayan would become the Grand Master of the Israelis and he would want war, to go to the Nile, to Beirut and to Damascus and he could do it for he was better armed than the disorganized Arabs but then he would have trouble not just with occupied Jordan but he would face colossal difficulties with the population of Egypt, Iraq and Syria. There would be assassinations and concentration camps, the Pipe lines would be blown up, the Arab governments would fall, Nasser and the Beirut government would fall and the Enragés (Madmen) would replace the existing Arab governments. Who would lead these madmen, certainly not the US nor the Soviets. This would not be good for anyone.

The President then said that this process applies not only to the Middle East but also elsewhere. It was vital that the US not engage in bilateral discussions with the Soviets when such negotiations involved the interests or derogated in any way our major friends. There might be times when two major powers such as the US and USSR who influenced the Israelis and Arabs respectively might find it useful to talk bilaterally within the framework of the Four Power negotiations but it would be better from all standpoints to move as 4 rather than as 2. To return to his question did the General feel that bilateral discussions with the Soviets on the Middle East could be appropriate if the opportunity ~~arises~~ arises provided that it is clearly understood that we would be talking to the French and British at the same time.
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General de Gaulle said that he would repeat what he had said earlier on this subject, that it was normal to talk to everyone. The Russians had given the French their memorandum bilaterally and had done so with the US also, an exchange of views was normal. But as the present had said it would be better for the matter not to appear as though it had been decided in a private US USSR deal. This would not be sufficient. As powerful as the Russians and the US might be they could not lead the Arabs and the Israelis to accept as solution in this manner. A solution must be reached as a group. This was why the French had proposed that the four propose a solution to the Security Council. If the 4 agree the Security Council will agree and this must be implemented. Now there is a decision but it is not being implemented. To be applied it must carry general agreement. The US had influence and power with the Israelis and the Soviets had the same with the Arabs. France did not have the same resources and power but she did have ways of making herself heard, particularly with the Arabs who wanted the French to participate in any settlement. This was natural and one of the reasons why he felt solution should be on basis of Four Powers. He felt that if a solution was proposed to the Council by the US and the USSR there might be difficulties but that if it was proposed by the Four there would be no difficulties in the Council.

The President said that he felt it was much better for the US to have company when we make an agreement on the Middle East rather than to have what some people call a Yalta idea of the US and the USSR making decisions on the Middle East. Also on the Middle East situation it was bad for the Soviet Union to appear to be the Arabs only friend. If the US, France, the USSR and in some measure the UK with Jordan moved together it would give a much greater appearance of even handedness.

General de Gaulle then said that if US and France could agree on a practical solution on the terrain they could easily obtain Soviet agreement as they were anxious for conflict there to end. He was not reassured by what might happen in the way of anarchy. If France and US agreed on a solution the Soviets would agree willingly.

The President said that he had read of some of the discussions that had taken place and it was his impression that French and US views in principle were moving in the same channels and he would hope that Foreign Minister Debre and

Secretary of State Rogers could talk while they were here because in principle it seemed that we agreed on what to say.

General De Gaulle said that Frankly France had been very favorable to Israel, and still favored its existence. They had been very favorable until June 1967 and then France had changed her attitude. Previously she had always supported Israel had sold her all the arms she wanted and she had wanted a lot. It was true that the Israelis paid for them. They had had very good relations. She had received Ben Gurion Levi Eshkol and A. A. Eban had often been there. But from June 1967 on France had changed her attitude. She had told the Israelis not to attack, that if they did they would have initial successes but later it would be difficult and they would create difficulties for everyone. France had told them that if they were attacked they would contribute to the defense of Israel. They had attacked and seized Sinai and parts of Jordan. Now the situation had become more and more difficult. France feels that the Israelis must return to their line of departure. After that steps may be taken to improve their frontiers. They must give up their conquests. Their existence must be recognized and they must have guaranteed. France was ready to see that they got freedom of navigation at Aqaba and Suez. We could not let things stand as they are. They will continually get worse and that will be bad for all.

The President recalled that General De Gaulle had talked along these same lines to him in 1967. He wished to clarify one matter in regard to Israel. Most people assume that US Presidents make decisions in regard to Israel under the influence of the political power of the Jewish vote in the US. He was not in that position. General de Gaulle said that he followed the US elections and knew that this was not the case with Mr. Nixon. The President said that he would make his decisions on the Middle East as on Strategic Weapons apart from political considerations within the US. Regarding Israel as a state and apart from any question of Jewish votes in the US the US will have to use its influence with Israel to get it to accept a settlement. This was a delicate matter and there must not be an imposed settlement, but one that the Israelis agreed to. As a practical matter General de Gaulle knew as well as he did that the Four Powers must agree as to what they would guarantee. A settlement would be of no value unless it was guaranteed. Israel was very sensitive about an imposed settlement. They would not accept a settlement imposed from outside. He believed that Israel could agree to the general outlines of what had been discussed today.

General de Gaulle said that if the Four powers agree and the Security Council does likewise they will have to have the means to implement such a settlement. If the Four agree the Israelis will have to accept, imposed is a word but the Israelis could not afford to be alone. It will be an imposed settlement otherwise the Israelis would not return to their line of departure. They would accept the settlement rather than face the troubles and possibly sanctions of the Security Council. The President said that we knew that.

The President then said that he tended to be somewhat pessimistic on the Middle East even if we get a settlement. Radical Forces such as the Fedayeen and others are operating in Egypt, Syria and perhaps Algeria and the Palestinians in Jordan. They are so strong that any settlement will be fragile and we would only be buying time. The President said that he felt it would be in the interest of Israel, France the US and UK and to some extent the Italians to strengthen the forces of stability in the Arab countries. We need even Nassir, compared to his possible successors he appears much better. We should certainly strengthen what some call the conservative forces such as Saudi Arabia and the Jordanians and further over Libya and Tunisia. After a settlement we would need a policy whereby the nations interested in stability in the area would give aid and support to existing governments who will abide by a settlement and prevent the revolutionary forces from taking over.

General de Gaulle said that this was quite right and that they would meet the following day to discuss these matters further and the meeting then concluded.