

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

12 November 1970, Elysées Palace, Paris, France

Present: The President
President Pompidou
Mr. Constantin
Major General V. A. Walters

President Pompidou opened the conversation by thanking the President for the gesture he had made in flying to France to attend General de Gaulle's funeral. He said that both he and the French people had been touched by it.

The President replied that he had long known and admired General de Gaulle. In the various meetings he had had with him he had always been impressed with the General's ability to concentrate on the essential and important things. In coming he had wished not merely to represent the American people but also to express his own personal admiration and respect for General de Gaulle. He also wished to thank President Pompidou for his communication after his recent visit to the Soviet Union. He had found his comments most interesting. He himself had not met the Soviet leaders and was therefore most appreciative of President Pompidou's views on them.

President Pompidou said that he could of course now tell the President a good deal more than he had in his written communication. First of all, there was President Podgorny. Despite his title, he did not have any real power. Kosygin was essentially an administrator despite his title and had taken almost no part in the political discussions, except that once or twice he had broken in to the conversation to make some anti-German remark (He was from Leningrad). Brezhnev, on the other hand, had behaved like the boss. He was hard as nails, sure of himself and sure of the Soviet Union and its military power. To him power meant military power. Several times he had told President Pompidou that his SS-9 missile was the most powerful in the world and that the USSR now had an advantage in missiles over the U.S. He had said several times that the USSR wanted peace but that "it never draws back." President Pompidou said that his general impression of the Soviet leaders was that while they were tough and wanted above all else to hold their status quo — this was why they were making treaties with the West Germans and trying to put their Eastern European house in order — they were not ready to embark on an adventurous policy like Khrushchev.

President Pompidou said that the Soviets were deeply concerned over their relations with China. Podgorny had told him that there was no reason why they could not have good relations from State to State. They had tried this with the Chinese but it had not worked. The Chinese would make transitory arrangements but did not want to make permanent arrangements that would hamper their territorial claims on the Soviet Union. The Soviets had offered a permanent settlement and the Chinese had refused. President Pompidou said that he had asked Podgorny if the reality was not that there was the long common frontier. On one side of it there were 700 million Chinese and on the other incalculable resources. Podgorny had replied, "Yes, that's it." President Pompidou had asked Podgorny whether the death of Mao would make any difference and Podgorny had been emphatic that it would not and the problem with the Chinese would remain. President Pompidou, as a European, did not find it unpleasant that the Soviets were principally concerned with China.

The President said that he was most interested in President Pompidou's views. Something had happened recently that seemed in some measure to confirm President Pompidou's views that the Soviets were cautious about embarking on a policy of adventures. Even though it was true that in heavy ground based missiles the Soviet strength was infinitely greater than it had been at the time of the Cuban missile crisis. In this category they had an advantage over us although we had advantages in other areas. He would tell President Pompidou something in the greatest confidence as it was known at only a very few levels in our own government. The Press had reported that the Soviets had been building a submarine base in Cuba. This was true. Our U-2 photography had shown unmistakable evidence of this. Instead of having a public confrontation, the President said that he had had Dr. Kissinger privately show Ambassador Dobrynin the evidence. Three or four days later TASS Agency had denied that the Soviets were building such a base and had no intention of doing so. Later Dobrynin had confirmed these assurances. The President said that he had handled this matter privately rather than put them in a public position of having to back down, which with their greater than previous strength they might be most reluctant to do.

The President then said that on the matter of Germany and Berlin he hoped that French and U.S. policy would remain as they were very close together. Germany must remain oriented towards the West and we must be firm on Berlin.

President Pompidou said that he had never understood the need for the Berlin negotiations in the first place. He had not felt them to be necessary but now that we were involved in them we had to arrive at some result. The President said that when he said we must be firm he did not mean that the Federal Government could not make small concessions regarding the presence of West Germany in Berlin. President Pompidou interjected that the West Germans were quite prepared to make many such concessions. The President went on that we should not renounce our rights in Berlin and that its umbilical cord should lead to the West. President Pompidou said he fully agreed.

The President said that there had been considerable speculation in the press and elsewhere on the possibility of a meeting between himself and the Soviet leaders. He wished to tell President Pompidou that as of now there was nothing of this type in sight. He would not preclude that at some future time, say in a year, such a meeting might not take place. He wished to assure President Pompidou that if such arrangements were to develop he would of course inform the French, British, and German governments so that they could consult together prior to such a meeting. He would, of course, inform President Pompidou so that they could agree on what form their consultation would take.

President Pompidou said that he was grateful for this assurance.

The President then said that in Indochina we would pursue our policy of disengagement, that is, strengthening the South Vietnamese Army as we withdrew. It did not appear at present as though much would come out of the peace negotiations, although private meetings would be held.

President Pompidou said that the really decisive moment would be when South Vietnamese elections were held in 1971. The President said that he agreed.

The President said that he knew how busy President Pompidou must be with all his visitors. He himself had had something similar at the time of General Eisenhower's funeral and therefore he did not wish to impose on President Pompidou's time.

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President Pompidou said that he much appreciated their frank talk and it had shown him that whatever the differences on minor matters might be, on all the issues that count our policies are the same.

As he walked the President to the door, President Pompidou said that the President could be pleased with the election results. The Republican party now knew who its boss was. The President had even elected a senator in New York.

The President replied that we had gained 20 percent in the Senate and lost 20 percent in the House, but that it was the Senate that counted in foreign policy.