

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Francois Mitterrand, President of France

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Andrew H. Card, Jr., Assistant to the President and Deputy Chief of Staff
Robert Zoellick, Counsellor, Department of State
David Gompert, Special Assistant to the President for European and Soviet Affairs (Notetaker)

Francois Mitterrand, President of France
Roland Dumas, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs
Hubert Vedrine, Advisor to the Office of the President
Jacques Lanxade, Chief, Military Cabinet
Pierre Morel, Diplomatic Counsellor

DATE, TIME March 14, 1991 (2:00p.m. - 3:20p.m.)
PLACE: Martinique

The President: How do you handle Yeltsin or other republic leaders from the Soviet Union when they come to France? (S)

President Mitterrand: I received the Lithuanian but not part of an official visit. That would be a mistake. (S)

The President: I'm getting pressure on our Soviet policy from both the Left and the Right. (S)

President Mitterrand: But Yelstin is not in power and Gorbachev is. Gorbachev should not be compared to Yeltsin, he should be compared to Brezhnev. It is not our responsibility to decide whether Gorbachev should remain in power or not. (S)

The President: I agree. (S)

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1999-0304 - F[1]

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President Mitterrand: More broadly, Europe doesn't need 20 more states. I think we should really soft-peddle on the question of internal developments in the Soviet Union. (S)

The President: You are right, we have to wait it out. But Gorbachev must get back on track on CFE. (S)

President Mitterrand: I agree that we have to be vigilant. But we cannot force Gorbachev over a cliff. (S)

The President: I hope Gorbachev survives. He's been good to work with so far. (S)

President Mitterrand: Yelstin is an important force. (S)

The President: Congress will invite Yelstin over, and then I will have to see him. I have a Congressional problem. They like to supervise. I would have gone to war with Iraq even without Congress, but I'm glad they came along in the end. (S)

Foreign Minister Dumas: We believe that there ought to be a United Nations Security Council summit meeting on the Middle East after a reasonable period of time. (S)

The President: (Facetiously) It's fine with me as long as Francois sit next to Castro. He is a real anomaly. He's the last one swimming against the tide. (S)

President Mitterrand: I know him. I met him in 1975. I would have to say that he is not unreasonable. My view is that an Hispanic can't be a Marxist-Leninist. (S)

The President: Perhaps we should talk about the situation in Yugoslavia. (S)

President Mitterrand: The break up of Yugoslavia would create a permanent source of war in Europe. We need larger groupings of states. For all of its problems the Austria-Hungarian empire at least preserved peace in a very unstable part of Europe. (S)

The President: With regard to the Maghreb, you know a lot more about this than we do. It's really your backyard. Is there any way we can be helpful? We respect the Algerian and Moroccan leaders. (S)

Foreign Minister Dumas: We stay in close touch with all of them except for Tunisia because of their stance on the war, and of course the Libyans. (S)

President Mitterrand: The real problem in the Maghreb is Algeria. Algeria is a big economic failure. They also have serious demographic problems and political problems. It is the largest source of instability in North Africa. But, overall, it

not too worried about relations between North Africa and the West. (S)

The President: Everyone predicted that this would explode during the war, but it was not as bad as we feared. (S)

President Mitterrand: It will eventually get sorted out. But a coup d'etat would be dangerous if fundamentalists came into one of the major countries. Of course, even fundamentalists get old. Qadhafi is a phony fundamentalist. He called me when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. He wanted to commiserate with me about all the mad men in the world (laughter). (S)

The President: Mubarak says that I should be more open minded about Qadhafi. Rocard told me that I was too harsh on the Tunisians also. (S)

President Mitterrand: I agree with you on the Tunisians. I'm very harsh on the Tunisians. With patience, the North Africans can solve their economic problems; but we will help. It will be okay in time. (S)

The President: Senegal is hopeful. He is a good friend of yours. (S)

President Mitterrand: He is a good, big friend (laughter). He was courageous during the war. As for Morocco, Hassan is modest in many respects, but he has a traditional, almost medieval, approach to his own rule. (S)

The President: What about the Southern Sahara? (S)

President Mitterrand: It's quiet now, but it is not solved. Morocco is gradually winning the war, and the Algerians can't prevent it. (S)

Tell me about your visit to Canada. (S)

The President: Mulroney is clearly in trouble. He is in a precarious political situation, and he is also very concerned about separatism. In the worst case, we can see a possible breakup into several countries. The war in the Gulf in a way brought Canada together. I was asked at a press conference, and I said we have done very well with a unified Canada. (S)

President Mitterrand: Speaking about Canada helps us understand Gorbachev's problems. (S)

The President: Yes, and the problems of Yugoslavia as well.

Returning to the Middle East, I never thought I would see Shamir as a moderate. (S)

President Mitterrand: It is strange. (S)

The President: May we discuss the weighing subject of European security. I would like to hear your view. (S)

President Mitterrand: I have seen what has been happening. I have seen a demarche from Washington. Your people have posed the problem in the wrong way. Europe is not ready to have a force adequate to provide its own security. This is still in a building process. It is not there, so this is a hypothetical dispute. NATO is the only real force; so in a way this is a debate between something that is real and something that is hypothetical. I fear that you think we want our own defense because we want you out, this is not the case. Any American hostility toward what we are trying to do will be misunderstood. Political unity and a common European security policy are hopes. In the 21st century my wish is that Europe will be able to defend itself but if I have to pay for that hope at the price of a crisis with the United States, the price is too high. Your diplomacy has given the impression that you are fearful of European unity. You are fearful that the United States will be thrown out. This is not true. We have to find a way so that NATO and the embryo of European defense can co-exist. We will naturally chose NATO if we have to. But what will we do twenty years from now? We should hang on to NATO, strengthen it even, but also let the embryo develop. It will be a long and difficult process. John Major is more keen on this than Margaret Thatcher was. (S)

The President: I'm not sure on how far apart we are. We don't want to convey the impression that we are trying to block European integration. We view NATO as the prime security guarantor, but we have no problem with European integration. (S)

President Mitterrand: Your demarche was very somber. Almost depressed. (S)

Robert Zoellick: We've encouraged European integration for 40 years and we understand now that it has moved on to another level. Our key point is that we want to avoid undermining NATO by making it the ultimate decisionmaker on matters that could affect all of us. (S)

President Mitterrand: France has a special policy but it is a part of NATO. Only NATO has real power. We won't replace something real with an idea. When the United States is gone, then it will be important for Europe to defend itself. (S)

Foreign Minister Dumas: Another aspect of European Security is of how to deal with the former Warsaw Pact countries. They want to join NATO. Poland especially wants in. This is a big problem for the Europeans. They also want an "East European Union." They realize that the only firm ground in Europe is the Atlantic Alliance. (S)

The President: Do you have a problem with the NATO liaison offices that we have suggested? Is this a problem for France?

President Mitterrand: No, this is not a problem. Political liaison and consultations are okay, and therefore military liaison is okay too. (S)

Foreign Minister Dumas: This could present a problem for the Soviets. (S)

President Mitterrand: On the question of European security relations with NATO, my wish is for permanent relations and for ministers and commanders-in-chiefs to talk about these things and avoid suspicions. (S)

The President: Our position is that NATO is to be the vehicle, where policy should get approved. (S)

President Mitterrand: We are agreed on that. (S)

The President: We also had planned to have some NATO/Soviet liaison. This may have been set back. The Soviet military is trying to flex its muscles, and this worries me. (S)

President Mitterrand: Yes, it is worrisome.

With regard to NATO, the idea of a bigger political role and a smaller military role is not clear to me. I also have a problem with using NATO for out-of-area. We have to be clear on what NATO's limits are. Ronald Reagan wanted NATO to guarantee Japan (this refers to a discussion of "global security" through the G-7). I pointed out that Japan is not in the Atlantic. But then I said yes we could work through NATO on Kuwait. Its just that it cannot be automatic. I won't go along with the automatic use of NATO out-of-area. (S)

The President: I take it that Kohl has financial problems because of the monumental task of East Germany. This turns out to be a bigger problem than anyone thought. (S)

President Mitterrand: Yes, it is more difficult than he and the rest of us thought. He called me just this morning. He can't go too fast on East Germany because of the difficulties. There is also the question about where the capital is going to be: Bonn or Berlin. But East Germany is the main problem, and the West German public doesn't want to sacrifice for the benefit of the East Germans. It used to be that all the Germans wanted was unification. Now that they are unified, they don't know what they want to be. There are still some nationalist movements in Germany which make it difficult for the Germans to renounce claims in Poland. (S)

The President: Is Europe experiencing difficulty in achieving monetary union? (S)

President Mitterrand: Not too much. We have another year to go.

I take it that you are happy with General Schwarzkopf? ~~(S)~~

The President: Yes, and also I have great admiration for your commander. In fact, our people have enormous respect for your military leaders and for your troops.

Let me know before you go to Iran. We would like to have better relations in Iran, so lets talk. Perhaps you could take a direct message. ~~(S)~~

President Mitterrand: Fine, I will either go in June or in October, I think probably in October. ~~(S)~~

Originally Processed With FOIA(s):
2000-0429-F

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Record Group/Collection: George H.W. Bush Presidential Records
Collection/Office of Origin: National Security Council
Series: Presidential Memcon Files
Subseries:

OA/ID Number: CF01728
Folder ID Number: CF01728-009

Folder Title:
[Memorandum of Conversations (Memcons) - January 1991-June 1991]: March 1991
