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THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Summary of President's Cabinet Room Meeting  
with French President Francois Mitterrand,  
March 22, 1984 (U)

PARTICIPANTS:

The President  
The Vice President  
Secretary of State George Shultz  
Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger  
Robert C. McFarlane  
Ambassador William Brock  
Ambassador Vernon Walters  
Ambassador Evan Galbraith  
Assistant Secretary Richard Burt  
Tyrus W. Cobb, NSC  
Robert Gelbard, Department of State

French President Francois Mitterrand  
Foreign Minister Claude Cheysson  
Ambassador Bernard Vernier-Palliez  
Elysee Secretary General Jean-Louis Bianco  
Special Counselor Jacques Attali  
Press Spokesman Michel Vauzelle  
Foreign Affairs Advisor Hubert Vedrine

DATE, TIME  
AND PLACE:

March 22, 1984  
10:45 a.m.-12:15 p.m.

The President welcomed President Francois Mitterrand to the White House and remarked that the visit could not have come at a more opportune time. America's relations with France have never been better, nor Alliance solidarity so strong. The Atlantic Community had withstood the challenge of the INF missile deployments and the French efforts had made a significant contribution on this. (S)

Although the press often puts our efforts to reduce tensions in a bad light, the U.S. was determined to improve East-West relations. We were making every effort to get arms control and arms reduction talks under way and we would be presenting a draft CW treaty shortly. The President suggested that this morning's meeting concentrate on international security issues and then asked for President Mitterrand's suggestions for improving our dialogue with the USSR. (S)

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President Mitterrand began by expressing appreciation for the warm welcome accorded him and noted that he agreed with the President's view that the Atlantic community was united. He noted that French public opinion firmly supported his strong stance on missile deployments and dealing firmly with the USSR. He added that there were few pacifist tendencies within France. In some other countries, such as the UK, the FRG and Italy, the governments demonstrated considerable courage in deploying the INF missiles. However, he could not prejudge what the future would bring, but expressed the hope that the other countries would be firm. He did not know what would happen in France, but did not think that a fundamental change in public opinion would take place. He remarked that we had been through two stages on INF: first, verbal confrontation regarding the missiles, sometimes including Soviet threats, followed by actual deployments. Now we were at the third phase: the Soviets were obliged to say they did not accept NATO's decision, but the real problem was how long it would take the Soviets to absorb and assimilate the situation involving deployment; how long would they devote to a posture of hostile silence; when would they offer to negotiate? He noted that the USSR had emphasized so strongly that it could not accept Western INF deployments that it finds a reversal of this course difficult to implement. (S)

President Mitterrand predicted that the Soviets would probably be willing to go back to the table during the second half of this year. First, they would go through a stage where they would actively make threats; then they would change their position to one of promoting negotiations. The U.S. elections would affect the tactics the USSR decides to employ. They might well wait until they saw how the elections would come out. He felt that gradually the Soviets would become milder, with a dialogue possible by the end of the year. Of course, there were two partners involved and part of the decision depended on the U.S. He added parenthetically that he hoped the same Soviet leader would still be around at the end of the year, since they seemed to be changing with considerable frequency. (S)

The President responded that we would be ready and we hoped we could bridge the gap between us and the Soviet Union. Secretary Shultz asked Mitterrand how, in his view, we could best probe and explore Soviet intentions. The Secretary suggested that there were two things we might consider: first, make direct substantive proposals to see if the Soviets would respond to issues that were not just bilateral, but also in a multilateral context, such as the CDE, MBFR, or on CW negotiations; this would indicate if the USSR was ready to respond in any way across the board. Second, each country had its own bilateral relationship with the Soviets, but we needed to coordinate our approaches to them. For example, he pointed out, two Western European Foreign Ministers, Jaime Gama and Hans-Dietrich Genscher, were going to the USSR in May, and Geoffrey Howe would go in July. So it was clear that the Soviets were probing, too. Under

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these circumstances, it was imperative for us all to stay closely in contact. The Secretary added that we must go beyond a general statement to the Soviets that we were prepared for a dialogue with them and make substantive probes. He then asked Mitterrand what his thoughts were on this. (S)

President Mitterrand replied that his present view of the Soviet Union, especially the internal situation, led him to be apprehensive. He did not think the Soviets had nearly as much unity as they proclaimed; they had 60 years of central organization, but the situation had changed in recent years and there seemed to have developed considerable fragmentation of power. For example, the military and the Party both have strong apparatus of power. This did not involve competition for the trappings of power -- the Army was not concerned about that -- but he was worried that the Army was playing a larger role. Further, the Army had ambitions and concerns it voiced from a powerful position. At the same time, he noted that a sense of ideological decadence appeared to have developed in the Communist party and among the apparatchiki. This had developed in Poland and Czechoslovakia. Romania had its own independent foreign policy, but exercised tight internal controls. East Germany was closely aligned with the Soviets, but was, in fact, more "liberal" than the USSR -- less corrupt, but perhaps more dangerous. Mitterrand expressed further concern that the internal dynamics of the Soviet Union at the present were becoming increasingly unstable; events in Afghanistan, Poland, and the KAL incident were very indicative of this and he feared that we might see more of the latter type of incident, involving the military's acting on its own. He voiced the concern that the USSR might be more dangerous now, more prone to react strongly to provocation. (S)

Referring to Secretary Shultz's points, President Mitterrand said he agreed that it was more a question of being alert for signals than the actual substance involved in what was said. He added that the Soviets could employ a variety of signs and we had to assess their importance. The USSR was a mystical country and signs and symbols were very important to them. He added, parenthetically, that there were two kinds of Russians; the apparatchiki, like Chernenko, who looked like battleships, and the other kind, like Brezhnev, who shook their fists at you and then turned around and kissed you on the lips. (S)

Citing to the INF talks, President Mitterrand said that he did not want France to attend as a participant, but noted, as a spectator, that in the theater there was often a dialogue between the actors on the stage and the audience. He expressed appreciation and thanks for U.S. determination in the negotiations as well as for

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U.S. firmness in excluding British and French systems. But that phase (of INF negotiations) was now behind us; it was essential that the U.S. not abandon the idea of deployment. In any event, British and French systems were not intermediate, but strategic forces; most French systems were submarine-based and could not be considered as tactical nuclear weapons. (S)

President Mitterrand pointed out that Vice President Bush had been correct in his statement of some months ago that the time would eventually come when there would have to be broader discussions. Mitterrand mentioned that at the U.N. this fall, he had said he was not against a global approach toward disarmament, since it could be a way out and might be a way to get the Soviets back to the table without losing face. He pointed out, however, that with everything on the table, UK and French systems would be quite small and he still expected the conditions for French participation that he had mentioned at the U.N. to be met before France could be involved. (S)

President Mitterrand said he had discussed East-West relations and arms control with Helmut Kohl last July before Kohl went to Moscow. Mitterrand said he told the Chancellor that he would not go to Moscow if he were Kohl, that the real discussions were between the U.S. and the USSR, and that, in any event, Kohl could not promise the Soviets anything. The only possible result would be a softening of German public opinion. Now, with deployment a fact, the situation was somewhat different, but the Russians still hoped to soften the Western coalition through all the visits of Western foreign ministers to Moscow. Mitterrand felt that the principle of the visits was a good thing but, as the Secretary suggested, they had to be coordinated within the Alliance and should be encouraged only as long as relations were strong within the Alliance. He noted that Foreign Ministers were often intelligent and certainly loyal, but in some countries they might be playing internal politics by going to Moscow. Mitterrand countered that for France, bilateral relations with the USSR had improved since INF deployment. Some visits had taken place; for example, Gromyko had come to Paris. It appeared that Gromyko now had much more influence than previously. Gromyko was more open now, also, and that might be a positive sign. During Andropov's time, Gromyko seldom talked; when Brezhnev was sick, he talked a lot and he was speaking out again. Perhaps this meant something about Chernenko. Overall, there was a marked detente in Franco-Soviet relations. Mitterrand stressed that when he got invitations or messages he would inform his friends. It was through such means that the Soviets would begin to send signals, but ultimately, it was with the U.S. that they must negotiate. The Soviets would also try to confuse things; that was why the Allies must all talk to each other. (S)

The President expressed appreciation for France's critical support on INF, and said that Mitterrand's Bundestag speech had especially helped. The President noted that an American Ambassador many

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years ago said it was a mark of stupidity to claim that he understood the Russians. The President suggested that perhaps we should all be adjusting our minds towards the Soviets; we had assumed all these years that we were the ones being threatened. They had brought this on themselves since virtually every Soviet leader at some time had declared his interest in world domination. The President wondered if the situation had changed and the Soviets had now abandoned ideology and the bureaucracy was simply determined to preserve itself. They appeared to have created a new kind of aristocracy of the type they had overthrown. The President asked rhetorically if the Soviets felt that we represented a threat to them, and if they had shifted from their position of aggressor? Should we accept the possibility that if we assure them that no one meant them harm that they might move toward a more peaceful posture?

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President Mitterrand replied that he did not believe that the Soviets wanted war. They were very rarely the direct aggressors, but that did not mean that they did not have a practical policy capable of starting war. The primary urge to avoid war derives from the leadership's desire to maintain their privileged place in society. However, the people in power did not have Stalin's energy and faced a very difficult economic situation, and this threatens their hold on power. He pointed out that they played chess very well, but did not play poker. Mitterrand said that they indeed may fear that the U.S. wants war. Since 1917, they have had a complex regarding encirclement; that, ironically, they feared that any setback would start a chain reaction like "dominoes." Mitterrand used the analogy of infancy: they appeared still to be living with the fears of their first two years, somewhat like psychoanalysts think an individual's complexes might develop in the first few months after conception. ~~(S)~~

President Mitterrand stressed that we must be vigilant, but needed to avoid what might be perceived by the Soviets as a provocation. This was why he insisted that a balance of force was vital for peace: the Soviets remained fearful of encirclement. He used as an example the story of the madman and the chicken. The madman thought he was a grain of wheat, and went to a psychiatrist and was cured. Upon leaving the hospital, he saw a chicken and went running back. The psychiatrist reminded him that he was cured and that he no longer thought he was a grain of wheat. The madman responded that he knew that, but did the chicken? ~~(S)~~

After the Bundestag speech, President Mitterrand said he had been accused of supporting the conservatives against his Social Democratic colleagues. There were real tensions in Germany and he felt that the Russians would try certain things aimed at dividing Germany and Western Europe as a whole. With respect to Soviet paranoia, Mitterrand told the President that he (President Reagan) could allay those concerns and fears. He said the President had

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certainly chosen the most difficult task in the world by assuming the Presidency of the United States. The Soviets do not want war and would not go to war unless they were scared. Thus, there were dangers of miscalculation. They, too, were waiting for signs from the U.S., and positive signals from America could allay Soviet apprehensions. (C)

The President expressed his appreciation for Mitterrand's discourse about the Soviet need to avoid war. He recalled that on the road to Moscow from the airport there were tank traps left over from World War II as a reminder of the effects of war. But the Soviets were still pursuing international blackmail and aggression. He mentioned Lenin's own statement predicting revolution would begin by organizing the Asian hordes, then taking Latin America and moving to the industrialized countries. He noted that if their fear of war could be allayed and they could be convinced that no one meant them harm, this would be an important step. The only way they resembled a superpower was in their military might; they could become a true superpower if they joined the family of nations. The President added that we had more to fear from them than they did from us, and asked how we could convince them we really wanted peace. He suggested that he would like to take Chernenko and the other Soviet leaders on a tour of our countries to see how our people lived, as a way of demonstrating that our system worked and that we certainly would not risk all this by resorting to war. (S)

President Mitterrand replied that this was a good point. He wondered how we could lure Chernenko out of the USSR, out of his "fortress," to do this. He pointed out that Lenin also said that they would not achieve their goals by war, but by ideology and by influencing the internal politics of other countries. But Lenin had been wrong on many occasions. For example, Lenin was mistaken when he said that revolutions would come from uprisings of the industrial proletariat in Germany, the U.K. and eventually the U.S. Revolution had never occurred this way, but only through the dissatisfaction of farmers and peasants. (C)

Mitterrand added that the U.S. had shown remarkable moral resistance to Soviet ideology. The U.S. should show the Soviets that it was a great peace-loving country and could move the whole world toward technological and industrial progress. The more the U.S. could create a climate that demonstrated the attractiveness of its system, the more the Soviets would be susceptible to modifying their behavior. (C)

Secretary Shultz interjected that it was true the Soviets did not want a major war, but they looked for other ways to extend themselves that were war-like. We had seen the development of organized state-supported terrorism, which obliterated the boundary between war and peace. It appeared to us that the tactics of organized terrorism were becoming one of the really important

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weapons and required lots of attention and thought. We had to decide how to defend against it, what preventive measures to take, and how to retaliate against it. This was something our two countries and the Alliance as a whole must learn to deal with. (S)

President Mitterrand replied that this was something we could perhaps talk about later. He agreed the Soviets did not want large classic wars. They were very good at chess and wanted to make threats of war, but not war itself. INF deployment had occurred because there had been no other option. If deployment had not occurred, the Soviets would have picked off each Western European country without having to go to war. The Soviets had other means of action: guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and local warfare. This could not be prevented, but whenever it took place we or others must block their way and do it quickly. Mitterrand suggested that as soon as the Soviets moved out of their natural environment they became awkward; they were not very nice people to get along with. No African country liked the Russians; Guinea had had an alliance with them, but Sekou Toure was now one of their main antagonists. Angola and Mozambique were now trying to diversify as were the Ethiopians, whose economy had been ruined by Soviet help. Mitterrand added that there was total incompatibility between Islam and the Soviets; what we see now in the Middle East were circumstantial alliances. The Soviets were not capable of keeping friends, as were the U.S. and France. He pointed out that we talked of our two centuries of friendship, but the Soviets gained allies only through opportunistic circumstances, not out of conviction. The Soviets exploited opportunities and were not above supporting terrorism; it was their nature to act that way. (S)

President Mitterrand added that he did not think that events in Central America were entirely caused by the Soviets. They examined the circumstances of each country case by case, to see if they were ripe, before they attempted to establish themselves. He noted that the Soviets were giving arms to Libya and the Soviet military was not far from Beirut. On Nicaragua, Mitterrand said he did not share the U.S. analysis, but added that on Central America our policies were not all that far apart. It would be dangerous for the Soviets to gain too much ground there. However, they could not be stopped by reliance on military measures only (S).

The President noted that they had run out of time. On the Middle East, he said he was deeply concerned about the Iran-Iraq war and the threat of closure of the Straits of Hormuz. He mentioned that he had made it clear that the U.S. would not allow the Straits to be closed, but we must all be on our guard. The President expressed the hope that they all agreed on this since that was another area in which the Soviets would attempt to become involved, perhaps by supporting both sides in the conflict. In conclusion, the President again extended his appreciation for France's independent, yet supportive, foreign policy and for Mitterrand's personal steadfastness in the Alliance.

The meeting closed at 12:15 p.m.

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