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France JB

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

25 October 1979

Dear Paul,

FRANCO-BRITISH COUNCIL: THE FONTEVRAUD CONFERENCE

The Prime Minister has seen your letter to me of 18 October on this subject. She would be prepared to attend the opening session of the proposed Franco-British Conference next year. The date 9 May is unlikely to be possible for her but 19 September at present looks suitable.

The Prime Minister is not enthusiastic about putting Anglo-French Summits on a bi-annual footing but perhaps this could be discussed further in the context of briefing for President Giscard's visit next month. The question of the timing of the opening of the Fontevraud Conference should, I am sure, be pursued as a separate issue.

Yours ever

Michael Alexander

Paul Lever, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

(1)



*Prime Minister*

*May 9<sup>th</sup> would not be possible* Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
*(Sixth Party Conference) but 19 September* London S.W.1

*would be O.K. After Lord Carrington's*  
*Recommendation at A, subject to* 18 October 1979  
*suitable timing? Yes*

*Dear Michael,*

*Hand 23/7*

FRANCO-BRITISH COUNCIL: THE FONTEVRAUD CONFERENCE

--- I attach a copy of a letter which Lord Thomson, Chairman of the British Section of the Franco-British Council, has written to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, concerning the proposed Franco-British Conference at Fontevraud.

At the 1977 summit the Franco-British Council (a non-official body supported by public funds) was charged with organising a high-level conference along the lines of the Anglo-German Königswinter Conference. Finance for this initial conference has already been committed by the two governments. The Chairmen of the French and British sections have subsequently made firm proposals for the conference to be held at Fontevraud in France (Versailles is being considered as a fall-back if the restoration of Fontevraud Abbey is not completed in time) with about seventy participants from each side. Their preferred dates for the conference are 9-11 May 1980. The proposals envisage that the President and Prime Minister would be present for the opening. They also envisage that at least one Cabinet Minister from each country would attend the conference throughout and participate in the discussions which are likely to cover economic and political cooperation as well as cooperation in the fields of information, culture and communications.

A The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary considers that the success of the conference and the organisers' ability to attract a suitably high level of attendance will depend very much on the project being seen to have the personal endorsement of President Giscard and Mrs Thatcher. It appears from Lord Thomson's letter that President Giscard has already agreed to participate in the conference on either 9 May 1980 or at a date to be agreed in September 1980 (preferably Friday 19 September) and has said that he would be happy to welcome the Prime Minister to France on either date. Lord Carrington regards the conference as a potentially significant factor in Anglo-French relations and hopes that the Prime Minister will be able to agree to attend.

As regards timing, arrangements now exist, as you know, for summits to be held twice yearly with both the FRG and Italy and Lord Carrington considers that the Prime Minister may like to discuss with President Giscard, during his forthcoming visit, whether the Anglo-French Summits should be put on the same footing (the Franco-German Summits also take place twice a year).

*please re.*

/However,

M O'D B Alexander Esq  
 10 Downing Street



However, as Lord Thomson points out, there is no need for a specific link, should the Prime Minister and President Giscard not want one, since they could both make a special visit to Fontevraud. The decision could, therefore, be made purely in terms of the general convenience of a May or a September date. Lord Carrington is inclined to support the earlier timing, to keep the momentum going. It would be helpful if you could give me an indication of the Prime Minister's reaction which we could pass on to Lord Thomson.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Martin Vile (Cabinet Office).

Yours GLEN

Paul

(P Lever)

Draft. 1. Done  
2. ~~W/S~~ for advice  
SH draft reply from  
15/10 s/s 5 17 October

DN 12/10  
PS  
S.S. file  
Mr Bellard  
Mr Ferguson

**Franco British Council** BRITISH SECTION

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The Rt. Hon. The Lord Carrington, K.C.M.G., M.C.,  
Secretary of State for Foreign and  
Commonwealth Affairs,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office,  
Downing Street,  
London, SW1A 2AL



9th October 1979

*Dear Peter,*

We have just completed a meeting in Paris of the Franco British Council, where we carried forward our plans for the proposed conference to be inaugurated by the President and the Prime Minister, as a starting point for a new impetus in our mutual relations comparable with the wide-ranging contacts both our countries have with Germany. I am writing as a matter of some urgency to let you know the situation that has developed about the timing of the conference.

Geoffroy de Courcel, the Chairman of the French side, reported the agreement of the Elysee to the President joining in inaugurating the conference on either Friday 9th May 1980, or alternatively on a date to be agreed in September, preferably Friday the 19th September. Since Franco British summits are taking place on an annual rhythm with the next one in London in November, this precludes a May conference being associated with such a summit meeting. The French indicated, however, that if Mrs. Thatcher were ready to make a special trip to France on May 9th for the conference, President Giscard would also be willing to agree to this arrangement.

Alternatively, if September were preferred and the British government wished to combine the Prime Minister's presence at the conference with the summit meeting, by bringing the date forward, the French President would also find that acceptable. The French side of the Council, who have the main responsibility for organising arrangements, are however concerned about delaying a decision about the date until the November summit. Although there are only a few weeks in it, they feel that if the May date is preferred, the extra time is of great importance in getting ahead with the various arrangements. I therefore wonder whether it might be possible through diplomatic channels to get agreement about the preferred date for the two heads of government attending this conference in advance of your meeting in London?

The Rt. Hon. The Lord Carrington

9th October 1979

There is an additional problem about the location of the conference. Geoffroy de Courcel and I, when we took over the joint chairmanship at the end of last year, inherited a long-standing commitment to hold the conference at Fontevraud Abbey on the Loire. It is of course an appropriate historic setting for such a Franco British conference, with its famous Plantagenet tombs. The French are engaged in the restoration of the Abbey as a major regional conference centre, and are obviously keen to see it established as a normal base for various kinds of Franco British consultations, rather on the lines of Konigswinter. The restoration of the Abbey is apparently a long-term and large-scale operation.

Some doubts have been expressed whether that part of the Abbey that would be used for the Franco British conference would be fully ready by next May, and I know that Reg Hibbert shares this concern. The French are heavily committed to Fontevraud, but have said they would be ready to consider an alternative site such as Versailles if it were to be judged that Fontevraud could not be ready in time. Once again, a clear decision about the date is required in order to bring this matter to the crunch.

I would be grateful for anything you can do to bring about the earliest possible decision about a date suitable to the Prime Minister for the conference.

*For - leave*

THE RT. HON. LORD THOMSON OF MONIFIETH, PC

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18 OCT 1979