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Prime Minister



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

17 November 1979

M O'D B Alexander Esq  
No 10 Downing Street  
London SW1

*Lg  
Pmt*

*Mufaxed to Chequers  
11.30am 18/11.  
Duty Clerk.*

*Dear Alexander,*

VISIT OF PRESIDENT GISCARD: FRENCH PROPOSAL  
FOR A EUROPEAN DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE

1. At the meeting of the Political Directors of the Nine in Dublin on 15 November, the French made a determined effort to secure agreement in principle to a public statement by Ministers at the Political Cooperation meeting in Brussels on 20 November endorsing French proposals for a European Disarmament Conference (EDC). If this is not agreed on 20 November, the French may wish to raise the matter at the European Council in Dublin. The French Ambassador has already told Lord Carrington that either President Giscard or M. François-Ponçet will wish to discuss French ideas for an EDC at the forthcoming Anglo/French Summit.
2. President Giscard himself is personally identified with French proposals for an EDC. In domestic political terms, they have enabled President Giscard to steal some of the opposition's clothes by coming forward with an initiative in an area where French Governments have previously adopted negative attitudes.
3. At a time when his Administration is facing difficulties at home, President Giscard has all the more reason for pursuing an initiative which he himself launched in May 1978 and for seeking public endorsement of French ideas for an EDC. Lord Carrington considers that President Giscard's interest in obtaining support from his partners for an EDC puts France in the position of demandeur. Hitherto, the other members of the Nine, most noticeably Chancellor Schmidt, have welcomed French ideas for Phase I (CBMs), while expressing reservations in relation to Phase II (reductions and limitations on conventional armaments). We therefore found ourselves increasingly isolated in adopting a lukewarm attitude to the proposals as a whole. For this reason, at the Ashford

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Castle meeting of Foreign Ministers on 20/21 October, Lord Carrington decided to adopt a more forthcoming approach to French proposals for a Phase I conference. Nevertheless, for the French, the UK still occupies a key position if they are to win support for their ideas in the Nine.

4. The French proposals to extend CEMs in a mandatory form to a wide area, including Soviet territory up to the Urals, could, with adequate verification provisions, increase NATO's warning of a surprise attack. A Western initiative, on CEMs could also be useful as part of the Alliance's counter to Soviet propaganda against TNF modernisation.

5. Lord Carrington's serious reservations about the substance of Phase II, which are shared by Mr Pym, remain unchanged. He considers therefore that we should continue to avoid any commitment which implies British support for a disarmament conference along the lines envisaged by the French for Phase II. But in the talks with the French next week, and in the subsequent discussion of French ideas among the Nine, there may be some scope for exploiting the French need for our support. Lord Carrington suggests that if the Prime Minister's tête-a-tête conversation with President Giscard on 19 November provides a suitable opening, she might tell him that she fully understands the reasoning behind French ideas for an EDC and the importance which the French attach to British support. Without implying that the two issues are of the same order of magnitude, the Prime Minister might point out that for our part the Budget is an important domestic political matter on which we look for French support. The Prime Minister might go on to say that despite our misgivings especially over Phase II, we are willing to work actively with the French in the Nine and NATO to secure public endorsement of an EDC on the understanding that mutually acceptable language should be found on the relationship with CSCE and on any eventual follow-up to Phase I.

6. If the Prime Minister decides to speak to President Giscard along these lines, I should be grateful if you could let me know the outcome before Lord Carrington sets off to attend the Political Cooperation meeting in Brussels on 20 November.

7. I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to the Secretary of State for Defence, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of the Cabinet.

*Yours ever*

P.P. P Lever

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