



PM/80/9

PRIME MINISTER

Prime Minister
 Obviously a v. useful talk. I attach
 a fuller record of the conversations in case
 you wish to check particular points

f.s. P. 4/2

Anglo-French Relations

1. Over the weekend I held the second in a series of private informal conversations with the French Foreign Minister, M Francois-Poncet, at the French equivalent of Dorneywood near Paris. The timing - on the eve of the latest and largest Franco-German Summit - was fortuitous, but useful.
2. My aim was to engage my French colleague in frank discussions on the whole range of political and Community problems, at a time when our relationship is becoming strained both because of the budget problem and because of differing responses to the Afghanistan crisis. This was beginning to give rise to criticism in the press and elsewhere that we were disregarding the European dimension and subordinating ourselves to the whims of American policy-makers in a pre-election period. The results of my visit were satisfactory on the political side. In fact, I found that our views were very close on essentials. The French are clearly interested in co-ordinating policy with us, as well as with the Germans. On the Community budget (on which I am minuting separately) progress was slight, though I hope that a better political understanding between us on world events will pay some dividends in future discussion of our budget problem.
3. I was struck by the realism and toughness underlying some of the more irritating French postures on Afghanistan. They see events there not as a Soviet miscalculation; but as a sinister shift of policy resulting from a struggle over the Brezhnev succession. They want the Russians out of Afghanistan, and are alert to the dangers of a weak response. They are critical however of American handling of the issue, and of her /allies.



SECRET

CLOSED UNDER THE
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION
ACT 2000

allies. On the Olympics, I detected some movement in the French position: Francois-Poncet made it clear that they would not attend if the Games were restricted to Soviet allies and a sprinkling of the Third World.

4. Francois-Poncet agreed that a new move on the Arab/Israel dispute was needed; and thought this should be undertaken by the Nine, or failing that, the French, Germans and ourselves, and that we should promote this with or without American approval. The French see it as in the interests of the West as a whole, including the Americans, to seize the moment to turn the Arab tide against the Russians. But they are also in favour of encouraging the Americans privately to establish a presence in the Gulf

Francois-Poncet

was also convinced that we could work with the new President of Iran, Bani Sadr, whom he knew to be European-minded. On Africa, the French were appreciative of our efforts on Rhodesia, which as you know they have supported throughout. They were alarmed about the extent of the presence of the Russians and their proxies elsewhere in Africa, and were quite ready to continue to intervene militarily if necessary - as they had done in Zaire, and less directly in Tunisia in the last week.

5. The French are not against the co-ordination of a Western response to recent events. They feel strongly, however, that this should be in the smallest possible forum. This enables them to be more co-operative, and less sensitive about their public position. They favour improvements in the political co-operation machinery of the Nine, but think it essential that they, the Germans and ourselves should try to agree a position before it is discussed in the Nine, or with the Americans.

/6. My Main

SECRET



SECRET

6. My main conclusions are that the French have no illusions about the heightening of the Soviet threat in the wake of Afghanistan; that the Franco/German axis in Europe is strong but not exclusive; that their actions in the Gulf, Africa and the Indian sub-continent (despite the Giscard/Mrs Gandhi communique) are complementary to our own, rather than in competition; and that by intensifying our political exchanges with both them and the Germans we can both enhance our European credentials, improve the chances of a satisfactory outcome over the budget, and minimise the danger of a rift between the Nine and the Americans in the testing period after Afghanistan. The real difficulty for the French, now as in the past, is their reluctance to be seen to be following an American lead. This will always present us with problems in the handling of these big international issues. But my talks with Francois-Poncet confirmed me in the view that, with reasonable deftness, this problem is manageable.

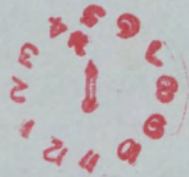
7. I am copying this minute to other members of OD and Sir R Armstrong.

(CARRINGTON)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

4 February 1980

SECRET



4 FEB 1980