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RECORD OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE  
CHANCELLOR OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY AT 1100 HOURS  
ON FRIDAY 4 FEBRUARY 1983 AT CHEQUERS

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Present:

Prime Minister  
Mr Coles  
Interpreter

Chancellor Kohl  
Mr Teltschick  
Interpreter

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The Prime Minister suggested that the two sides should attempt to cover, during the talks, the current visit of Vice President Bush to Europe, the question of INF stationing and attitudes towards the zero option proposal, world economic prospects, trading problems with Spain and Japan and between the United States and the European Community, CAP price fixing and the EC budget problem. The latter problem could have an effect on electoral prospects in the United Kingdom just as some of the other subjects she had mentioned could be relevant to the German elections of 6 March. We wished to do all we could presentationally to help Chancellor Kohl at the present time.

Chancellor Kohl said that he agreed with this agenda and suggested that EC matters should be covered when the two Foreign Ministers joined the talks.

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He first wished to comment on the problem of INF stationing. It had not been his intention to make this an election issue in Germany. Strictly speaking, this should have been unnecessary because he was maintaining a policy of the former Chancellor Schmidt. The latter claimed to be the father of NATO's two track decision and until a few weeks ago he took pride in that claim. Now he attempted to deny his responsibility for the decision. But the fact was that he had helped prepare it and had had Herr Kohl's support when he was in opposition. Now the matter had become an election issue. Herr Brandt had become the dominant figure in the SPD and, together with Herr Vogel, was arguing against INF stationing. If the talks at Geneva failed and the German Government took the decision to station the American missiles, the SPD would oppose this.

The Prime Minister said that Herr Schmidt had always staunchly supported INF stationing. Surely he had not personally changed his views. Chancellor Kohl commented that the SPD had changed their views completely. Schmidt had moved half-way from his previous position. In principle, he supported the German Government's policy but he hated not being in office and hated Herr Genscher. So he did not allow reason to speak. However, his influence in the SPD was now very small and he had no patronage left. For all practical purposes, he was finished as a politician.

The Prime Minister said that if the SPD won the German elections and INF missiles were not deployed, the failure to implement NATO's decision would have unimaginably damaging consequences.

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Chancellor Kohl said that President Mitterrand's attitude was very important. He had recently spoken in the Bundestag on this issue and taken a very firm line. People had commented that he had spoken much as the Chancellor himself spoke on this question. The SPD were fighting the elections on the basis that they were the party of disarmament and that Kohl wanted an election victory in order to station these dangerous weapons. He was not worried by this line which he did not think had popular backing.

As regards the zero option, his position was very clear. Soviet intermediate rangemissiles should be completely abandoned and not just moved into the Asian area of the Soviet Union. That was the objective towards which we should negotiate. Moreover, it was a clear objective which people could understand. Ordinary people had difficulty with specialised terminology. A kind of "disarmament Chinese" had developed which frightened people. Some generals and diplomats did not understand that the arguments must be put in plain terms if they were to carry conviction. In particular, it was important to find formulae that the young could understand. That was why the zero option proposal was so valuable. The need for concrete results at Geneva should also be stressed.

The Prime Minister said that it seemed likely that we should not obtain the zero option objective. So Cruise and Pershing would have to be stationed in accordance with the agreed NATO line. She herself took the view that the zero option was a special case of balance. The purpose of nuclear weapons was to deter. But deterrence could only work if balance existed. It would take five years to station all the missiles required by the NATO decision. So there would be time to

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negotiate zero or a balance at a higher level. But she believed the West would be vulnerable if it stood rigidly on the zero option which was unlikely to be achieved by the end of 1983.

Chancellor Kohl said that he absolutely agreed with these arguments. He had always made it clear that he was opposed to a policy of seeking everything or nothing. We should set the objective and move towards it. The important thing was that the negotiation should be serious and the timetable should be respected.

When Mr. Gromyko had recently visited Bonn his behaviour had been very different from previous occasions. On earlier visits he had acted like a military governor. This time he was more like a prospective, if elderly, bridegroom. During their five hours together Gromyko had at one moment viciously attacked the United States and Reagan but he had told him quietly to drop that approach. The United States were Germany's friends and he was not prepared to conduct such a discussion. Gromyko had immediately abandoned this approach. He (Kohl) had concluded that Gromyko was trying to establish how far he could push the German Government. For the rest of his visit he had behaved like an old man giving advice to the young. When the German side had raised the case of Sakharov, they had expected a sharp reaction. But Gromyko had quietly argued that this was not a subject to be treated at their level. Gromyko's principal intention had been to discover whether the Chancellor and the German Government were firm on the NATO decision of 1979. His tone had been friendly but his position hard. He had kept asking whether he could tell Andropov that the Chancellor stood for detente and disarmament. The Chancellor had replied in the affirmative but said that it was necessary to define the terms. Gromyko had then told a Press Conference that Kohl stood for these things but had left out the definitions.

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He had told Gromyko firmly that if the Geneva negotiations failed, Germany would station the INF missiles. Since Gromyko's departure the East Germans had said that Gromyko had reported to them that his discussions in Bonn had been very friendly. Herr Genscher had just learnt in Prague that Gromyko had told the Warsaw Pact countries that they should co-operate with the present Government in Bonn. It seemed that they expected the Government to win the next elections.

Andropov was likely to adopt a more flexible position on INF stationing. He had serious economic problems and was committed to heavy expenditure on other aspects of the Soviet armed forces. If the West remained united, there could well be some movement. Mitterrand was absolutely reliable on security questions, more so than his predecessor. The Italians were not likely to present problems. If Germany stood firm, so would the Netherlands. He had known Mr. Lubbers for years. Lubbers had visited Bonn last week and had explained that he was in great difficulties with his party. But nevertheless the Dutch were likely to remain firm - and if they did so so would the Belgians.

He had told Vice President Bush that with regard to the Geneva talks the position of the Allies was stronger than it had been a year ago. Europe's other problems with the United States were secondary to these questions of defence and security. Europe must support America.

Bush had been disturbed by the present attitude of the SPD. Many people in Washington had for too long identified Germany with the SPD. This was partly due to the nature of the East Coast establishment. Over the years the SPD had given a great deal of money to American scientific institutions

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and universities. Many SPD supporters now worked in the United States where they preached the glories of German Socialism.

One difficulty was the inconsistency of statements by US politicians. The major speech made by Bush during his recent visit to Germany had been excellent and President Reagan's "open letter" had made a good impact. But two days later it was reported from Arizona that Reagan had said that his letter was no more than propaganda.

The Prime Minister said that the West was entitled to point out consistently that its aim was to abolish a whole class of weapons and that we were the true disarmers. But if the zero option was unobtainable for the time being, what were US negotiating aims in Geneva? She thought we should try to negotiate a balance short of the zero option while recognising that the Russians would do everything they could to use bogus figures and to secure agreement that the British and French nuclear deterrents should be included in the debate. She was worried by a recent report that the Netherlands Prime Minister had said privately that these systems should be included. This attitude was quite wrong: the British deterrent was a weapon of last resort.

Chancellor Kohl said that he had told both Gromyko and Vice President Bush that Germany supported Britain's position on the British and French deterrents very firmly. On this matter he was entirely on our side. He had every confidence in the United States but even more in Germany's European friends who were geographically closer and whose fates were more closely interwoven. Everyone knew that neither Britain nor France was threatening the Soviet Union but merely safeguarding their own national security. And that meant that Britain and France were also guarding Germany's security.

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With regard to the zero option, he had told Mr. Bush that the decisive phase in the negotiations would begin to emerge at about the time of the Economic Summit at Williamsburg. The participants should use the opportunity to discuss this matter with Bush in the margins of the Summit. We should stick to our objective - the zero option - and campaign strongly for it. We should adhere to the NATO double decision and then negotiate step by step to see what we could achieve. Bush had told him very privately that the United States were thinking of putting Pershing I into the package but only after 6 March (from a remark by Mr. Teltschick, it appeared that the American reference had not been to Pershing I but to other obsolescent systems). It was not a question of everything or nothing. If the Soviet Union were prepared to scrap some of their missiles and the Americans stationed only some of theirs, then parity should be established. If we insisted on everything or nothing, we should obtain no results. There was no difference between us on these matters.

The Prime Minister said that she understood that after 6 March the Americans would probably attempt to achieve an agreement on something less than the zero option. Chancellor Kohl said that he agreed. It was very firmly the German view that the Americans should make this attempt. But now was not the time to say we were abandoning the zero option. The Prime Minister agreed; but we should point out that any other balance which could be negotiated was a step on the way towards the zero option. Chancellor Kohl said that he agreed entirely.

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The Prime Minister asked whether the Chancellor had discussed with Mr. Bush the timing of deployment. She recalled that the Chancellor had told her earlier that one of his reasons for going to the country in March was to avoid deployment coinciding with elections. A similar problems could arise in the United Kingdom. So she wished to tell Chancellor Kohl in confidence that we were thinking of suggesting to the Vice President that November would be the best month for actual deployment. We should then be seen to be leaving several months for the negotiations in Geneva to bear fruit.

Chancellor Kohl said that he too was thinking of the late autumn. But he had not discussed the matter with Mr. Bush, the focus of whose current visit to Europe was very circumscribed.

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Chancellor Kohl said that he had gathered from discussions that had taken place at another level that we planned to accept in June or July the first transport vehicles necessary for the Cruise missiles. He wished firmly to warn us against this timing. As soon as these vehicles were visible in the United Kingdom, they would be seen on German television. Then no-one would think that genuine negotiations were taking place in Geneva. The Prime Minister said that she agreed with this argument. It was important that nothing should become visible before the end of the year. Chancellor Kohl said that he was delighted that the Prime Minister agreed with him. He had made the same point to Vice President Bush. But she would hear different arguments from the Netherlands Prime Minister. The Dutch were thinking of asking for an extension of the deadline for negotiations e.g. until the end of 1984. He had told them that there was no good reason for postponement. If 1984, why not 1985? The Prime Minister firmly agreed. The Dutch would be running away if they made this proposal.

Chancellor Kohl said that he hoped that the Prime Minister would tell Vice President Bush that Germany and the United Kingdom were in total agreement about the problems connected with INF stationing. But she should also advise the United States to negotiate seriously and bear in mind the psychological situation in Europe.

He suggested that, in dealing with the press later, he and the Prime Minister should say that they were both firmly in favour of NATO's dual track decision; we wanted serious negotiations; we had absolute confidence in the United States who kept us closely informed; and we expected the Soviet Union to take a step forward. We should make it plain that we favoured the zero option, that it was not an all or nothing proposal and that in the course of the Geneva negotiations we should see what results were obtainable. These did not have to be quantified at this stage. For the sake of British public opinion he would say that Britain

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could rely on Germany. Germany did not wander between East and West.

The Chancellor suggested that views should be exchanged about the Economic Summit in Williamsburg. Perhaps one or two members of his own private staff and those of the Prime Minister could be instructed to work out the essential aims of the two countries for Williamsburg; then perhaps he and the Prime Minister could talk again before the Conference. We must tell the United States that Williamsburg must not become a propaganda exercise. President Mitterrand had told him that he would never repeat the failure of Versailles. In the Spring, the eyes of the world would be upon Williamsburg. We could not afford a spectacle of large gala dinners and no results. The purpose of these Summits was consultation, not decision. He did not want hundreds of officials and journalists to be present. It would be necessary to discuss agricultural questions at Williamsburg and make it plain to the Americans that their attitude towards the CAP presented us with problems.

The Prime Minister said that she believed that the Summit must discuss protectionism in general (for the CAP was protectionist). The United States, Japan and France were protectionist when it suited them. At these Summits, we had never dealt firmly with the Japanese on trade. But protectionism was spreading and we were all suffering from American protectionist measures. However, if we criticised these, we must expect retaliatory criticism of the CAP. Moreover, in a war based on competitive subsidies for exports, the Americans would win. She agreed that the Summit must not become a propaganda affair. But it would be necessary for the participants to agree upon certain broad approaches which could be described to the media.

It was agreed that the Chancellor and the Prime Minister would compare notes about Williamsburg at the next bilateral Summit in April.

/ The Prime Minister

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The Prime Minister said that she wished to mention the problem of the United Kingdom's trade with Spain, where we faced an enormous discrepancy in tariff arrangements. A number of companies were investing heavily in Spain, taking advantage of low wages and low overheads and under-cutting activity in the rest of the community. This was having a very serious effect on an important area of the United Kingdom and was fundamentally unfair. We had made it plain to the European Commission that the situation could not continue.

Chancellor Kohl said that he wished to mention the question of a possible East/West Summit. He had often argued that it would be useful for there to be a carefully prepared meeting between President Reagan and Mr. Andropov. For if the Russians were to move on INF they would do so at a Summit, not in Geneva.

The Prime Minister said that any Summit would have to be very carefully prepared. The Russians would be tempted to exploit public opinion in the West so that pressure was brought to bear on President Reagan to make a success of the Conference. This could be disastrous. Chancellor Kohl agreed that these dangers had to be borne in mind but said that he was convinced that the West held better cards than the Russians. He did not believe that the Russians would take any more tricks.

The Prime Minister said that it was possible to have a good hand but make a mess of playing it. A Summit between President Reagan and Mr. Andropov could be the meeting of the century. It would have to be very carefully prepared and rehearsed.

A.J.C.

4 February 1983