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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

19 October 1987

Dear Charles,

Prime Minister's Talk with President Mitterrand

Your letter of 3 October asked for an assessment of the Franco/German discussions on defence. I enclose a translation of President Mitterrand's subsequent message.

The French

President Mitterrand's initiative is further evidence that French defence thinking is moving away from Gaullist isolationism. This can be seen in the creation in 1981 of the Force d'Action Rapide (FAR), one of whose purposes is, as Mitterrand's letter makes clear, to fight alongside German troops; in the French display of interest in cooperation with the Germans and with ourselves; in increased readiness to envisage equipment collaboration in Europe; in their willingness to become involved again in the conventional arms control process, after staying out of the MBFR negotiations; and in their revived interest in the WEU.

The main reason for this shift is a growing recognition that a purely national defence policy makes neither strategic nor economic sense. This has been fuelled by anxiety at the possibility that one day economic, demographic or congressional pressures may force the US Administration to cut back on the numbers of US troops stationed in Europe; and by French concern, not least in the light of the Reykjavik Summit, that the Americans are no longer solid on the crucial nuclear issues. A third factor is a conscious effort to anchor Germany to the West, based on fear of a German drift towards neutralism. Despite the President's assurances that M Chirac is also behind his initiative, Mitterrand's current activity may also owe something to determination to show that he is the prime mover in French defence policy. Chirac has been noticeably cool in his public comments on Mitterrand's efforts.

The Germans

Mitterrand's initiatives are welcome to the Germans because they may offer a means of involving the French more closely in forward defence of the FRG. The Germans have always been solid Allies: they claim that they fully

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recognise the need not to undermine arrangements made with other NATO allies. But there must be some risk that their enthusiasm for working with the French could draw them into arrangements which could detract from their obligations under the Alliance's integrated military structure (IMS), on which their security ultimately relies.

#### The Substance

The Franco/German measures so far announced (and listed in President Mitterrand's letter) do not yet amount to very much from the military point of view. The agreement last year between Mitterrand and Kohl that if there was time the French President would consult the Chancellor before using French tactical nuclear weapons on German soil does not commit the French to more than a crisis hot line, and only if they are disposed to use it. In the recent "Cheeky Sparrow" exercise, there was a minimum of joint activity by French and German units, although deployment of French troops within 100 kilometres of the inner-German border is one of the most tangible results to date of German efforts to bring the French into forward defence of the FRG. The joint brigade so far appears likely to be more symbolic than operational. The joint Defence Council could represent no more than a formalisation of existing consultations, raised to head of state/government level. There seems at present to be no likelihood that the Council would take decisions cutting across NATO Force Planning. Thus far, therefore, the measures have had at least as much symbolic as practical value. They do not amount to any profound re-orientation of German defence policy away from NATO.

#### UK Policy

Our attitude to the measures needs to take into account the political as well as the military factors, and possible future developments as well as the current position. There are potential hazards: if Franco/German efforts were to cause the Germans to give lower priority to their commitment to the Alliance, or cause the Americans to believe they could reduce their commitment to the defence of Europe, this would clearly be bad for the Alliance and for the UK. But there is no sign at present that these risks are real. Indeed, there could be practical benefits, both to ourselves and to the Alliance, if we join the Germans in trying to involve the French more closely.



On the nuclear side, we are considering the suggestions set out in President Mitterrand's letter, although they go beyond the list agreed by Mr Younger and M Giraud. In settling the agreed topics for these exchanges, we explained to the French that, at this stage at least, there were a number of areas we did not think it appropriate to include. These included sharing patrol cycles and information on targetting. We are following French plans to develop a new air to surface missile; the French will be giving us a technical demonstration on 30 October. On the conventional side, we should consider stimulating French support (from the First French Army as well as the FAR) for NORTHAG; and use in crisis by our aircraft of French airfields. More generally, any step which enables the Alliance to exploit more fully its defence resources (and French resources are certainly not fully exploited to Alliance benefit currently) is to be welcomed at a time when Alliance defence budgets are under increasing strain. The French are clearly interested in collaborative or reciprocal ventures and there are a number of significant projects in prospect.

We should encourage the French (and the Germans) to keep the risks clearly in mind. President Mitterrand's response to the Prime Minister suggests that he has registered them; and his letter stressed that Franco/German cooperation falls within the framework of the Alliance. But he also makes clear that the French consider that it has a momentum of its own. British opposition to the latest moves would not halt them; the two countries would move ahead on their own. Our leverage will be greater if we accept the invitation to try to steer the relationship in the right direction from the inside. This will make it easier for us to ensure that the US angle is fully taken into account; and that Franco/German activities remain subordinated to Alliance activities as a whole.

The Foreign Secretary believes that the best way to achieve this goal is by further developing our already strong bilateral defence links with both France and Germany, and by seeking where possible a modest amount of triangular discussion. To do so will have the added advantage of helping to fulfil broader and more far reaching British policy objectives. These relate to the need for careful management of inevitable longterm changes in the US/European balance within the Alliance, in particular the requirement for Europeans to take greater responsibility for their own defence in the future. The 3 major European defence powers will play a key part in steering European developments in the right

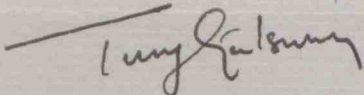
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direction, particularly in locking smaller or weaker countries into cooperative efforts which will ensure that they enhance their contribution. Without some small, inner management core the European performance is likely to drift, and to be fractured and inadequate. Strong bilateral defence relations between ourselves, the French, and the Germans, will provide the basic foundation for this enterprise, in which the UK is well placed to take the lead. But we shall only be able to do so if we take an inside track at the outset.

These matters are the subject of continuing study and discussion between the Foreign and Defence Secretaries. We have also initiated some discussion with the French and the Germans, aiming to ensure that developments remain palatable to ourselves, the Americans, and the Alliance as a whole.

I am copying this letter to John Howe (Ministry of Defence) and Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever,  


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Private Secretary

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