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From the Private Secretary

23 October 1987

Dear Tony,

MEETING WITH MONSIEUR BUJON

I enclose a note of a talk which I had today with M. Bujon who had come over at M. Chirac's request. We were both clear that we were talking personally. It would be helpful to have any comments on the exchange, although I would not want the note circulated at all widely or the fact of the meeting referred to in contacts with other French officials.

I am copying this letter and the note to John Howe (Ministry of Defence) and Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office) on the same restricted basis.

Yours sincerely,
C.D. Powell

(C.D. POWELL)

A.C. Galsworthy, Esq., C.M.G.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

PRIME MINISTER

TALK WITH MONSIEUR BUJON

You may like to see my note of my talk today with M. Bujon, M. Chirac's diplomatic adviser, who came over at M. Chirac's request. As you will see it was mainly concerned with European defence issues. In the light of what he had to say, I am coming to the view that it would be useful if I were to have another talk with Herr Teltschik. Would you agree to this?

Chirac is keen to have an informal bilateral with you in the second half of November to prepare for the European Council and wonders whether you would be willing to go to Paris for a half day during a weekend (e.g. 21/22 or 28/29 November). I know you will not be keen but I think it might be useful. Perhaps we could discuss this.

C.D.P.

(C.D. POWELL)

23 October

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NOTE FOR THE RECORD

MEETING WITH MONSIEUR BUJON

Monsieur Bujon, Diplomatic Adviser to Monsieur Chirac, came to see me today. The main purpose of his visit was to discuss European defence questions. But we also touched briefly on a number of other current topics.

European Defence

M. Bujon said that there was considerable confusion within the French government over European defence issues, largely the result of cohabitation. M. Chirac wanted to be sure that the Prime Minister fully understood his position, which was by no means identical with that of President Mitterrand. He would therefore start by explaining the background.

When President Mitterrand and Chancellor Kohl had met last July, they had apparently decided that, against the background of a looming INF agreement, there needed to be some sort of initiative in the field of European defence. They had set M. Attali and Herr Teltschik to work with instructions to come up with proposals. In the course of discussions during late July and August - from which the French government as opposed to the Elysee had been excluded - the Germans had tabled a paper proposing the creation of a Franco-German Defence Council. They suggested that this should meet regularly to harmonise strategy, to supervise the deployment of the mixed Franco-German Brigade, and discuss doctrine for the use of France's short-range nuclear weapons (or pre-strategic weapons, to use his phrase). Attali for his part appeared to have tossed in a proposal for a step forward in parallel towards monetary integration.

M. Chirac had discovered the existence of these discussions at the end of August and had intervened strenuously with President Mitterrand. The latter had appeared to retreat somewhat, and had agreed with M. Chirac that discussions should

advance cautiously, and that there should be contacts in parallel with other governments such as the United Kingdom. Subsequently Chirac had also spoken to Chancellor Kohl at their meeting in Ludwigsburg, and explained that President Mitterrand's proposals went beyond the agreed position of the French government. But only three days later, President Mitterrand made a public statement in Germany, while attending the Franco-German manoeuvres in Ingolstadt, to the effect that France and Germany were discussing the creation of a Defence Council, which might also be open to countries such as Spain and Italy. This led to another row between President Mitterrand and M. Chirac, and agreement that there should now be a moratorium on public statements while the issues were examined in greater detail. This had not stopped President Mitterrand making further comments during his State Visit to Germany this week. His telephone call to the Prime Minister could be explained by a guilty conscience, stemming from the reference to Italy and Spain as possible partners in the Defence Council, while omitting the United Kingdom.

To sum up: the proposed Franco-German Defence Council was a German idea, as was the mixed brigade. Chirac did not want to be hurried into ill-considered initiatives. He was open to discussion with other countries, particularly the United Kingdom. But this whole area of European defence was particularly delicate in France in the run-up to the Presidential elections. M. Chirac had to be careful not to get himself into a position where he seemed to be blocking a European initiative favoured by President Mitterrand. To do so would carry a heavy political cost.

Turning to nuclear issues, M. Bujon said that M. Chirac had been surprised by the proposals which President Mitterrand had put into his recent message to the Prime Minister, since he knew that they were ideas which had already been discarded as too ambitious at this stage. (Incidentally he said that the French government had received a copy of President Mitterrand's message to the Prime Minister from the French Ambassador in London, who had got it from a British source.)

The French government had been no less surprised by President Mitterrand's comments this week in Germany, which seemed to imply that French short-range nuclear weapons might be moved up to the Elbe, so that their use would not automatically involve German territory. This in turn contradicted what the President had said only a week or two earlier in an interview with Le Monde, in which he had dismissed short-range nuclear weapons as largely irrelevant, and said that France would concentrate on strategic nuclear weapons and the neutron bomb. None of this had been debated within the French government, although the government shared President Mitterrand's concern about the steady drift of German opinion towards complete removal of all short-range nuclear missiles. Even Strauss was talking of a third zero option.

I said that this account of the perils and problems of cohabitation was fascinating, but left me even more confused about French policy and intentions. I would like to offer some personal comments. Our own starting point was full commitment to the collective defence of Europe through NATO. We would judge any proposals by whether they contributed to or detracted from that. At first sight, President Mitterrand seemed to be proposing a series of privileged, bilateral defence relationships between France and other partners. Whatever the motive - and it might well be the intention that these bilateral relationships would be parallel to NATO rather than substitute for it - the effect might be to loosen the cohesion of NATO, or at least to making the further and closer integration of Europe's forces in NATO more difficult. This worry was strengthened if one considered some of the practical aspects of the Franco-German proposals. For instance, all German units were supposed to be committed to SACEUR. But this would patently not apply to the mixed Franco-German Brigade. It might therefore be considered as detracting from SACEUR's authority. There seemed to be no idea of deploying French troops in a crisis to the northern sector where they would be most useful. Moreover it was suggested that the proposed Defence Council would discuss Franco-German strategy.

But could there be a strategy which applied to France and Germany and not to other European members of NATO, particularly Britain with 60,000 troops in Germany? Of course if the purpose was to provide some sort of cover for integrating the role of French forces more closely into NATO, that would be welcome. But nothing so far put to us was open to this interpretation. Another source of some concern was the French attitude on WEU. Their proposed Charter or Declaration was valuable, and we supported it: but their determination to prevent the move of WEU institutions to Brussels where it could work more closely alongside NATO was bound to add to the impression of diluting or distracting NATO. In saying all this, I was not reflecting any considered British government view. Indeed, our public statements about Franco-German cooperation had been positive and welcoming. But there were some concerns about where the path which France seemed to be treading might lead. As for Franco-British nuclear cooperation, this was being discussed between Defence Ministers, and it would be a mistake to try to wrench it out of those channels.

M. Bujon said that these were fair comments. He would try to explain French motives - or at least M. Chirac's motives - more coherently. There were two main factors. First, Franco-German cooperation was seen in France as the motor of Europe and no Presidential candidate could afford to look hesitant about it. The approaching anniversary of the Elysee Treaty created an irresistible occasion for a further step forward. Secondly, there was a very genuine fear in France of signs of drift in Germany, apparent not just on the issue of short-range nuclear weapons but also in the renewed interest in re-unification. This had to be countered by anchoring Germany firmly into a European defence system. That said, any steps forward on Franco-German defence cooperation were likely to be modest. The mixed Franco-German Brigade would be created by the juxtaposition of national regiments and only the staff would be mixed. The units comprising it would, on the German side at least, be territorial forces. There were many difficult problems still to be addressed, for instance,

the question of nuclear cover for the French component of the mixed Brigade. Similarly, the Defence Council proposal was not really ripe for decision. The most it was likely to amount to was a joint declaration of intent to coordinate strategic thinking more effectively. The Germans' main motive in proposing it was to try to use the proposal to force France into prior consultation on the use of French short-range nuclear weapons. There was not much will on the French side to go forward on this. More generally France understood the constraints imposed by Germany's participation in the integrated military structure of NATO and for that matter by France's own doctrine on nuclear weapons. There was no thought of trying to revive ideas of a European defence community.

M. Bujon continued that M. Chirac would like to see any step forward on Franco-German consultation balanced by a Franco-British initiative. There were various forms which this could take. But given that France and Britain were the only two nuclear powers in Europe and strongest in their support of nuclear deterrence, it seemed natural to look to the nuclear field. One possibility would be a commitment to a joint study of the successor to France's ASMP (air to ground missile) or of a new Cruise missile. The French government understood that Britain was locked into the United States for its strategic nuclear requirements, but this did not apply to other sorts of nuclear weapons. Or we might establish a joint Anglo-French Defence Commission or Working Group. He was not authorised to make any specific proposals, but was simply casting around for ideas. The only point M. Chirac wished to stress was his desire to see Franco-German cooperation matched by Franco-British cooperation.

I said that I appreciated the spirit behind these last remarks and the desire to maintain a balance between Britain and Germany. The place to make specific proposals was in the discussions between Defence Ministers. I remained concerned, however, that privileged bilateral relationships would detract from the collective effort in NATO. Germany was already

anchored into the European defence system through its membership of NATO. That should be reinforced. I did not think we could take matters much further. I was sure that the Prime Minister would be grateful for the account of M. Chirac's thinking. No doubt they would want to discuss this subject when they next met.

We also discussed a number of other issues.

European Community

M. Bujon noted that experts from his office would be meeting Mr. Lavelle and others on Monday. He had the impression that French and British officials were working well together. He thought that M. Chirac was becoming steadily more sceptical of the possibility of reaching agreement at the European Council in December, although he would be prepared to work for one. He did not mention an oils and fats tax (although I would not read much into that).

Gulf

There were no differences of view. The French Government support the recent US action. They have no plans at present to withdraw their aircraft carrier from the area. They agree on the need to keep up pressure on the Russians at the United Nations.

In reply to my question, M. Bujon said that there were no new developments on the French hostages. He did, however, refer to a plan to release some of the locally engaged staff detained within the Iranian Embassy in Paris in the hope that this would be seen as a goodwill gesture and lead to some corresponding concession by the Iranians.

New Caledonia

M. Bujon complained about the section of the CHOGM communique dealing with New Caledonia. I said that we had done our best

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and the French were lucky to have got off so lightly. M. Bujon expressed concern about the forthcoming vote at the United Nations but said that France hoped to win some extra supporters to its side.

Falklands

M. Bujon said that M. Chirac had made a genuine effort to persuade President Mitterrand to change the French vote this year to an abstention but had not succeeded. I said this was disappointing.

Submarines for Canada

M. Bujon confirmed that the Canadians had approached the French Government about the possible purchase of nuclear submarines. The French were sceptical whether the Canadians would really buy them as well as of their capacity to cope with them. He complained of anti-French bias in the lower reaches of the Canadian defence ministry.

Bilateral between Chirac and the Prime Minister

M. Bujon said that M. Chirac would very much welcome a bilateral meeting with the Prime Minister in the second half of November to prepare for the European Council. He suggested a half day at a weekend. The election campaign made it difficult for Chirac to travel. If at all possible, it would be a kindness if the Prime Minister were to go to Paris.

C.D.P.

(C.D. POWELL)

23 October 1987

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