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## 249. Memorandum of Meeting

Washington, May 11, 1962, 4:30 p.m.

### PRESENT

The President, Ambassador Alphand, M. Malraux,<sup>1</sup> M. Lebel, Mr. Bundy

After pleasantries about M. Malraux's visit to the National Gallery, the President asked M. Malraux if he would like to state the general views of his government on major problems. M. Malraux answered that in talking with the press he had already found that there were certain mistakes with respect to French policy. First, France was not opposed to entry of Great Britain into the Common Market. There was a misunderstanding here which could be cleared up in Paris.

The President interjected that as he understood it, the French thought that the British should choose between the Commonwealth or the Common Market. A sharp choice here would make things difficult for Prime Minister Macmillan, who had to contend with his Labor opposition. The United States itself had urged that those applying for membership in the Common Market should pay the full entrance fee, but the question in his own mind was whether in fact General de Gaulle did not fear and oppose British entry into the Common Market.

M. Malraux replied that while the formulation of the press made the question impossible, the President's formulation was no more than difficult. Without denying that General de Gaulle might desire to keep the British out of the Common Market, M. Malraux remarked that in affairs of state the French would not act according to their desires any more than the Americans. If England really wished to join the Common Market, nothing could prevent her. The President said that one does deal in terms of desire in these matters, and that this was exactly what troubled him. The United States favored British entry into the Common Market not as a matter of simple U.S. interest. Indeed British entry would be against the economic interest of the United States and was desirable only on the larger political ground of holding the Germans as a part of Western Europe.

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Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, France. Top Secret. The meeting was held in the Cabinet Room. A memorandum of Malraux' conversation with the President along these same lines on May 13 is in the Johnson Library, National Security Files, Aides Files, Bundy. A memorandum with Rusk the following day is in Department of State, Secretary's Memoranda of Conversation: Lot 65 D 330.

<sup>1</sup> Andre Malraux, French Minister of State for Cultural Affairs, visited the United States May 10-16 at the personal invitation of President and Mrs. Kennedy. (Memorandum for Bundy, May 10; *ibid.*, Central Files, 033.5111/5-1062)

M. Malraux asked whether the British would come with or without the Commonwealth (thus formulating the question in just the fashion the President had described as worrying.)

Ambassador Alphand contended that the French reservations on this matter were no different than the American. The President said that it was difficult to force a man to choose between an old wife and a new mistress, to which Alphand remarked that except for a short period one might keep both, while Malraux contended that to arrange one's affairs with both might involve boring troubles. The President repeated his view that the Common Market would be helpful in tying the British in, but said that perhaps in the French view this additional attraction was no longer needed—perhaps the French believed that the Germans were already safely attached. He repeated again that if the United States could support the entry of the United Kingdom at a time when it was losing gold on the balance of payments, it was a fair question why the French should be so reluctant.

The President continued that our feeling was that General de Gaulle apparently preferred a Europe without Great Britain and independent of the United States—a powerful force which France would speak for. This view brings France and the United States into conflict. We have felt that the defense of Europe was essential to the United States. A Europe beyond our influence—yet counting on us—in which we should have to bear the burden of defense without the power to affect events—would not be desirable. General de Gaulle should make no mistake: Americans would be glad to get out of Europe. Just before the President took office, President Eisenhower had recommended to him a cut of 2/3rds in the number of U.S. divisions in Europe—although of course the nuclear guarantee was to be maintained. The President instead had built up American strength. He wondered whether General de Gaulle's fundamental attitude was based on his experience with Americans in World War II, and he repeated that Americans would be happy to leave Europe if that was what the Europeans wanted.

M. Malraux replied that the President had quite naturally spoken purely as an American and he would like to reply in strictly French terms and take the President's propositions in inverse order. The President was more sure of the idea of Europe than the Europeans were. The Europeans dream of Europe and they talk of it, but the reality is very difficult and very uncertain. It is possible that de Gaulle does have a certain mistrust of England as a part of Europe. The President must understand that for a very long time in European history England had been a marginal part of European affairs. But if England really means to join Europe, then on balance France would like it. M. Malraux felt that he himself could hardly be charged with a lack of sympathy for the Brit-

ish—he was the only French Cabinet Minister with a DSO. But there was a fear that this would not work.

If General de Gaulle now looked toward Germany, it would be precisely because he sees the possibility of a real understanding with the Chancellor. For all Europeans, progress toward the reality of Europe was a matter of trial and error, enacted wherever they could make a breakthrough. De Gaulle in his attitude towards Germany had shown that he was not inflexible, and it was harder for him to change his basic view towards the Germans than it would be for him to change in his view of England.

Returning to the United States, M. Malraux began with the nuclear problem. The U.S. position had initially been based on the fact that the U.S. was the only nuclear power. The U.S. had not merely leadership but complete responsibility. From the time of the first Soviet development of atomic weapons, the problem changed its shape. From the American point of view there was now a real question about a third force. For M. Malraux this was a purely verbal notion.

The President interjected that we did not fear that such a third force would be neutralist. We were concerned, instead, about whether there was to be a wholly separate, independent force unrelated to American responsibility and interest.

M. Malraux indicated his own view that such a force would have a convergence with the U.S. in military and economic affairs—with probably some formula of association.

The President said that we have no sense of *grandeur*, and no tradition of leadership among the nations. Our tradition is fundamentally isolationist. Yet since World War II, we have carried heavy burdens. In our international balance of payments we have lost \$12 billion, and the drain on our gold continues. We have engaged in a heavy military buildup, and we have supported development of the Common Market. When there was trouble in Berlin last year, the burden came on us. We have called up 160,000 men while France brought in two new divisions, and now France was reducing the period of military service. We find it difficult to understand the apparent determination of General de Gaulle to cut across our policies in Europe. If it is desired that we should cease to carry the load in Europe, nothing could be better from our point of view—it has now cost us about \$1,300,000,000 to maintain our forces in Europe and the savings on these forces would just about meet our balance of payments deficit.

The President said that he and all of the leading members of his Administration were great admirers of de Gaulle—and also of Adenauer. Yet there seems to be a conscious French effort to eliminate us from the affairs of Europe. After Vienna, the President had increased the defense

expenditure by \$5 billion and unbalanced his budget. Yet on a whole series of matters—Congo, NATO, and Berlin itself—the French were pursuing an opposite policy. Apparently there was a fear that the U.S. wished to dominate Europe. Yet such an idea was wholly wrong. As for the atomic difficulty, that came because on every other matter there was trouble. The reason seems to be a basic French drive to be wholly independent of the Anglo-Saxons. The President is not an Anglo-Saxon but he would be glad to take the U.S. out of Europe if that was what the Europeans wanted.

M. Malraux remarked that he did not think that de Gaulle's feelings toward either England or the U.S. were derived essentially from his experiences in World War II. The President replied that he had read General de Gaulle's books.

M. Malraux said that France had lived in the presence of real threats to its existence for all of its national life, while the U.S. had had no such experience until very recently. France had experienced disaster in 1940, and for many years after 1945 there was in France the absence of the feeling of a State. At practically no point was the French State in operation. For the President of the U.S. in the same period, the idea of the American State was clearly based on his capacity and responsibility for the defense of the nation. The French Army of today had faced twenty years of fighting all over the world without defending France, and that is why it has gone mad. What is now needed is to re-create a State in which the orders of the government are carried out. To do this, General de Gaulle must have a fundamentally national idea, and this idea is the idea of self-defense. Wherever the American line of thought crosses this purpose, the dialogue between the two countries becomes unreal. (The French word which M. Malraux used repeatedly was "faussé.") It was essential that the French should understand the position of the U.S., but the Americans also must understand the French complex on self-defense.

The President replied that the Americans also were committed to the defense of the West. The line of defense for all of us was in Germany. How could each country defend itself merely by its own means within its own borders? We must defend our interests together at the place where defense is necessary.

M. Malraux answered that his point was not military. It was a point about the nation itself, as a nation under a State. If this nation under a State could not defend itself, it would be liquidated at once under pressure.

The President asked how American policy cut across this basic French purpose.

M. Malraux asked whether our policies do in fact cut across each other. He agreed that we had some quite serious problems, but he

thought also there were a considerable number of misunderstandings. What were the real problems?

The President said he had been speaking of the defense of Europe. M. Malraux repeated that he thought there were a number of misunderstandings. He would not wish to discuss such specific problems because obviously he was not the Foreign Minister. He would instead like to find out what were the basic American perspectives and purposes. He had read the President's books but in France he thought people did not understand just what American policy was.

The President said that our policy is very simple: it is to sustain and to assist countries which wish to be independent. This effort was going on all over the world and it placed a great strain on the resources of the United States. We would like to have the help and support of our friends in Europe in this work. But the President repeated that he did not see how this work could go forward if, in fact, General de Gaulle's dream was that of independence from the United States and Great Britain in a Europe in which France was the leader. The President repeated that if this were to be the policy of the European continent, the United States would like nothing better than to leave Europe. M. Malraux said the President might be right about the dream of de Gaulle, but that a dream is not the same thing as what one does in reality. He asked, speaking not as a Cabinet Member but as a historian, whether the United States could in fact leave Europe. The President replied that we had done it twice and that to stay there even now was very expensive. We were there now because of our obvious responsibilities, but some Europeans seem to regard our presence in a more sinister light, as a kind of unwarranted interference in their internal affairs. M. Malraux remarked that when the United States left Europe before, Russia was not a threat.

The President replied that certainly the Russian threat is the reason that we stay. He then reviewed his own personal experience since becoming President. We had made a tremendous effort after Vienna and the President believed it was these military efforts which had led Khrushchev to veer away from the showdown which had loomed in Berlin at the end of the year. Yet General de Gaulle seemed to say it was his determination which had produced the results. The President did not enjoy making these great military efforts. The United States was carrying a very large load, and in particular he found it very hard to understand this latent, almost female, hostility which appeared in Germany and France, and an apparent sentiment that we might not be reliable in keeping to our engagements.

M. Malraux interjected that de Gaulle does not believe at all that it was his statements of determination which had stopped Khrushchev. He did not think any French member of government had this kind of hostility toward the United States. The President interjected that there

might not be so much of this now (probably referring to the change of Prime Ministers). M. Malraux repeated that France simply must recreate her nationhood and cannot endure to have her defense entirely in the hands of another nation, however friendly. The question of re-creating a nation was the immediate question for France. M. Malraux thought the matter of mistrust was a deep question to which he would wish to address himself further.

The President asked why these French requirements made it necessary to oppose NATO and to oppose the diplomatic probes. What was the reason that we always wound up in such sharp disagreement? The President believed that given the dangers and the heavy responsibilities which the United States faced in Berlin, we must make an effort to talk. Such talks might not work, but we ought to find out. The President did not find an overwhelming determination in other members of the alliance. He had asked the Chancellor how many divisions he would have in the first fighting in Germany, and the Chancellor preferred to talk about a naval blockade. Now we read in the papers of a Franco-German axis. If there was to be such an axis, the President would be glad to let it try to handle the Berlin affair. The President repeated that we do not understand the posture of France.

M. Malraux said that we could make a list of disagreements and work on them but that what he was really trying to do was to get to the center of the matter. His feeling was that the dialogue between the two countries was completely at cross purposes. The President repeated that we have done the military work while France had opposed probes, and this opposition had spread to Bonn. So we wind up with the alliance in disarray. The feeling in Bonn and Paris appears to be that the United States is not standing firm, and the President is getting tired of it.

M. Malraux replied that he did not think France had ever opposed the probes. He was familiar with General de Gaulle's January letter to the President,<sup>2</sup> in which France had said she did not believe in the success of the probes, but this was not the same as the President's accent of conflict on the matter.

The President thought it was much more than that. The French position had indeed been regarded as opposition. If the U.S. were not carrying the load, then the President could understand a policy of every man for himself. But he knew from General Clay's cables that whenever there was trouble the call went out for the U.S. Yet he could get no cooperation from General de Gaulle. Back in December he had telephoned asking for a change of a few words in a communiqué—with no result.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See footnote 1, Document 239.

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 2, Document 119.

The only reason the President could find was that somewhere deep down inside, General de Gaulle does not want the Americans in Europe—perhaps, the President again suggested, as a result of his experiences in World War II.

M. Malraux said that if that was what the President thought, then the end of the conversation was quite opposite from the beginning. We should start all over again. But what is important is that that is what the President thinks, and we can start again from there. The President replied that all the difficulties in communication were due to him and not to Ambassador Alphand, who, he was sure, had communicated the President's feelings very accurately. The President reminded M. Malraux that his wife is deeply Francophile, and that he himself had a great respect for General de Gaulle. De Gaulle had done two great things: first, he had achieved the Franco-German rapprochement; second he had handled the French withdrawal from the colonies in such a fashion that it was a victory for France. He thought that General de Gaulle was right 80% of the time, but he did wish that de Gaulle might say that we were right 20% of the time. Alphand said with a smile that perhaps the proportions were reversed. To make his basic point more sharply, the President said that we feel like a man carrying a 200-pound sack of potatoes, and other people not carrying a similar load, at least in potatoes, keep telling us how to carry our burden. If others would carry their share, the President could understand it. But we had done most of the work and now we were carrying most of the burden of criticism. The President was not going to do both.

M. Malraux said that while the President might believe in some Bonn-Paris axis, he himself did not believe in it at all. The President repeated that when we ask what others will do, we get a poor answer. They will make no military effort, and we must make no diplomatic probe. We are told that we ought not to speak for others, but only for ourselves. Yet the others do not make a corresponding effort. In these circumstances, should we continue?

M. Malraux replied that while he recognized that the President was carrying the potatoes, others had their own burdens, a point which the President had said he understood and recognized. M. Malraux agreed that any misunderstanding was not due to the Ambassador, and concluded by saying that we should direct our attention in the next discussion not to minor troubles but to the major central question.

The President agreed, saying that his whole object was to find out what the central difficulty was in our relations with France.

McG. B.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Printed from copy that bears these typed initials.