

Note from the German Ambassador to Washington to Gerhard Schröder (23 January 1963)


Caption: On 23 January 1963, the day after the signing of the Franco-German Treaty of Friendship, Karl Heinrich Knappstein, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) to Washington, drafts a summary record of his meeting with the US President, John F. Kennedy, who has expressed his dissatisfaction with the conclusion of this Treaty.

Source: SCHWARZ, Hans-Peter (Hrsg.). Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1963. Band I: 1. Januar bis 31. Mai. München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1994. 601 S. ISBN 3-486-55964-8. "Botschafter Knappstein, Washington, an Bundesminister Schröder", p. 162-165.

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Ambassador Knappstein, Washington, to Federal Minister Schröder (19 January 1963)

[...]

The President was in a palpably bad mood, giving clear and repeated expression to his critical views on the internal state of the Alliance and to his concerns regarding the conclusion of the Treaty. In the course of the discussion, I sought repeatedly, albeit with only partial success, to persuade the President of the case for concluding the Treaty; I emphasised the Treaty's positive significance for the political life of Europe and for the future of the Alliance and pointed to the possibility that close Franco-German cooperation might bring benefits for the entire Alliance precisely with regard to those aspects of de Gaulle's policies which were an irritant to the President.

The President's reaction on reading a translation of the letter is summarised below:

In 1958, de Gaulle had proposed that a tripartite Directory be created for NATO ⁽⁸⁾. At that time, Eisenhower had refused to accept the proposal on the ground that it would have reduced the Federal Republic to a second-rank power within the Alliance. The French proposal had been revived in 1961 ⁽⁹⁾, and he, Kennedy, had once again rejected the tripartite Directory — for the sake of the Federal Republic. One week after de Gaulle's press conference ⁽¹⁰⁾, which had revealed a policy directed against the United States, the Federal Republic was now signing a Treaty with France whose content went far beyond what a tripartite Directory would have brought. It was for our sake that America had declined a tripartite Directory, for our sake that the atomic secrets had been withheld from France, for our sake that the multilateral NATO nuclear capability had been planned. America had had plenty of opportunities to conclude with France a treaty similar to the one that Germany had now concluded with it, de Gaulle having turned against the United States. What were the Americans to think of that?

(There followed a reference to a sharply critical article by James Reston published in the 21 January edition of the *New York Times* ⁽¹¹⁾.) The remarks made yesterday by Senator Javits in the Foreign Affairs Committee (text follows under separate cover) were already, he observed, an indication of how people here were reacting.

For 15 years, Truman, Eisenhower and he himself had provided for the defence of Europe. Six US divisions were stationed there, with equipment for a further two divisions. France was contributing only one-and-a-half divisions. Why did we not demand an appropriate contribution from France? If Europe believed that it could defend itself, that was fine by him. The Americans had no desire to remain there any longer if Europe was in a position to defend itself. However, the withdrawal of American troops from Europe would be a catastrophe for the entire free world.

Just at the time when Khrushchev was beginning to modify his policies and rifts were appearing in the Communist bloc between Moscow and Peking, the line taken by de Gaulle offered the world the spectacle of divisions within the Western Alliance. That was insane. What would happen in other parts of the world, in Laos, in South Vietnam, throughout East Asia and in Latin America, if the free West fell apart in this way?

He could see no sense in the Germans and the French wishing to create a 'force within a force'. How was the NATO Alliance supposed to work if two members committed themselves to consulting each other first and then adopting a common position? If the Franco-German Treaty resulted in Bonn supporting Paris in its anti-Americanism, the consequences for the Alliance and for the fight against Communist expansion in all parts of the world would be catastrophic.

I emphasised to the President the Treaty's historical and psychological significance for the two neighbouring countries. He doubted, however, whether this was really no more than the culmination of the process of reconciliation between France and Germany. For him, the historically decisive steps had been the Schuman Plan ⁽¹²⁾, the resolution of the Saar question ⁽¹³⁾ and the Rome Treaties ⁽¹⁴⁾; he did not believe there was currently any risk of a Franco-German conflict which must be countered. Ultimately, the President did at least concede that he believed the short interval between de Gaulle's press conference and the signing of the

Treaty to be, at least as far as we were concerned, a ‘coincidence’.

Although the President listened attentively to what I was saying, he appeared far from convinced by my explanation that what was proposed here was not a Franco-German ‘Directory’ which would take decisions for the Alliance, as the tripartite Directory previously proposed by Paris would have done; it was simply a scheme for consultation between the two neighbours. It was, I explained, entirely possible that on many issues consultation would not lead to Franco-German agreement. There was no question of commitment in advance to common positions in, for example, the EEC Council of Ministers or the NATO Council. It was important for the President to understand that both sides had committed themselves to consultation; this created opportunities to exert influence which had not existed before. The letter from the Federal Chancellor and (if the as yet unofficial information in this regard proved correct) the readiness on the French side to agree to a resolution of the Brussels negotiations crisis ⁽¹⁵⁾ by means of a report from the Commission, were already early indications that German influence was being brought to bear through the avenue of negotiation.

Responding to an allusion on my part to the US-UK Nassau Agreement ⁽¹⁶⁾, the President said that this Agreement was quite different in kind to the Franco-German Treaty. Firstly, it resolved the bilateral Skybolt issue and, secondly, it represented substantial progress towards a multilateral solution ⁽¹⁷⁾ on nuclear defence. Indeed, it had been one of the aims of the Agreement, and not the least, to involve the Federal Republic in the command and control of the Alliance’s nuclear defence.

The President indicated finally that he was pleased to have received the letter. All that could be done ‘for the time being’ was to try to make the best of the situation and wait and see how the Franco-German consultative arrangement worked out in practice. I promised to convey his views to the Federal Government without delay.

[signed] Knappstein

Minister’s office, VS-Bd. 8475

(8) On 17 September 1958, the French President sent US President Eisenhower and British Prime Minister Macmillan a secret memorandum in which he demanded an expansion of NATO’s sphere of operation and direct participation by France in the political and strategic decisions of the Alliance (‘tripartite Directory’). For the wording of the memorandum, see Charles DE GAULLE, *Lettres, Notes et Carnets*, June 1958–December 1960, Paris 1985, p. 83 ff. For the German wording, see Alfred GROSSER, *Das Bündnis. Die westeuropäischen Länder und die USA seit dem Krieg*, Munich 1978, p. 264 ff.

(9) See the letter of 6 July 1961 from the French President to US President Kennedy; Charles DE GAULLE, *Lettres, Notes et Carnets*, January 1961–December 1963, Paris 1986, p. 102 ff.

(10) For the press conference of 14 January 1963, see doc. 21.

(11) See James Reston, *What Do They Think We Are?*; *The New York Times*, No. 38348 of 21 January 1963, p. 6.

(12) For the wording of the proposal, dated 9 May 1950, by French Foreign Minister Schuman concerning the unification of the Western European coal and steel industry, see *Europa-Archiv* 1950, p. 3091 ff. See also ADENAUER, *Erinnerungen I*, pp. 327–331.

(13) Following the rejection of the Saar Statute in the plebiscite held in the Saar on 23 October 1955, an Agreement was concluded by the Federal Republic and France on 27 October 1956 on the incorporation of the Saar into the Federal Republic. For its wording, see *Bundesgesetzblatt* 1956, Part II, pp. 1589–1836.

(14) For the Rome Treaties of 25 March 1957, see doc. 10, note 3

(15) See in this connection docs. 30 and 31.

(16) For the Nassau Agreement of 21 December 1962, see doc. 2, note 2.

(17) For the various concepts for a NATO nuclear capability, see doc. 12, note 12.