

December 8, 1944

Conversation between General de Gaulle and Marshal Stalin Friday 8 December 1944

Citation:

"Conversation between General de Gaulle and Marshal Stalin Friday 8 December 1944", December 8, 1944, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Documents Diplomatiques Francais, 1944, vol. 2 (3 septembre - 31 decembre), pp. 419-22. Translated by Scott Smith. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/123309>

Summary:

General de Gaulle discusses France's positions on the German question in terms of Germany's borders, disarmament, and alliances. De Gaulle insists that Germany's Western border should not extend past the Rhine and that the country should be disarmed militarily, economically, and morally. He argues that international alliances between the USSR and France should be multilayered, and should include some involvement United States. Stalin argues for the benefit of a tripartite pact between the USSR, France, and England. Stalin then describes a pact between the USSR and France to bolster Poland.

Original Language:

French

Contents:

Translation - English

CONVERSATION BETWEEN
GENERAL DE GAULLE AND MARSHAL STALIN
Friday December 8, 1944

P.V.
Very Secret

French in attendance:

General de Gaulle
Mr. Bidault
Mr. Garreau

Soviets in attendance:

Marshal Stalin
Mr. Molotov
Mr. Bogomolov

General de Gaulle.--Up to this point we have discussed many things. The moment has come to express clearly our position on certain problems of capital importance for you and for us.

For us our main focus, the vital question, is the German question.

The problem of French security in regard to Germany is composed of three elements:

- a. borders
- b. disarmament
- c. alliances

a. and b. As for the German borders, we have no objection to the eastern border being marked at the Oder and the Neisse.

As for Germany's western border, we consider it crucial that the German state or states exert no sovereignty, in any form, west of the Rhine.

Disarmament itself has three aspects: military, economic, and moral.

On the subject of economic disarmament, we will consider not only that heavy industry not be used--even in part--for armament with in Germany, but also that German sovereignty over the Ruhr Valley--with all its resources--should be taken away, placing the area under the control of an international regime, not only for administrative purposes but also to ensure the utilization of mines and factories for peace.

This internationalization of the Ruhr could be in effect less difficult than one would think. Aside from several administrators, the population is composed almost exclusively of workers. They could be made into a cosmopolitan populous. There is already a fair number of foreign workers. Others could be made to come. The cosmopolitan nature of the Ruhr's population, to a certain extent, would facilitate the establishment of an international regime.

As for the southern German border, we believe that it is necessary to return the Sudetenland to the Czechoslovaks and make Austria a free and independent country.

As for Germany itself, we have no preconceptions. We shall see.

c. We now arrive at the topic of alliances. There are two big countries who, because of their geographic positions, are particularly exposed to German aggression: France and the USSR.

Furthermore, these are the only two countries that, because of the nature of things, always have and will maintain large armies. In Great Britain the permanent army is

and will always be an object for discussion; both here and in France, the army is an institution.

Because of the nature of things it is natural for us to be allies in the first place, in a way that enables us to act preventively and to respond immediately. We are the only two countries who can do this. If we are associated in such a way, the other states of Europe--for example, the Balkan states--will not be able to go to the other side because we will be the strongest.

In the French point of view, the Franco-Soviet alliance comes in first place.

As for Great Britain, history--above all the twenty years that separated the two wars--shows that it is very hindered from acting preventively and immediately. First, this is because of its geographic position. All other British actions are dependent upon concord with its dominions. They are very remote: they are not directly threatened and they have diverging interests. For all these reasons it is difficult for Great Britain to take preventive measures or immediate measures in the case of conflict.

This is why in 1914 Great Britain hesitated before entering the war. It only acted because

Belgium was invaded and thus England immediately felt in peril. If German aggression had been direct not westward but eastward, England would have had problems making a decision. Even though Britain acted in September 1939, it was after a long series of capitulations. In return when the Germans are acting aggressive and Great Britain feels threatened, it acts with steadfastness, courage, and energy. It is certain that Great Britain should be associated with France and the USSR in the defense of the peace. But that is a different level of security.

Security should be seen, in the end, from a global perspective. Here, I think specifically

about the participation of America, who is vexed by European quarrels which it does not completely understand, who has a wide range of interests scattered across the globe, whose main concerns are not in regard to Europe and who does not act until the final moment. Roosevelt did not enter the present war until France had been beaten, Britain was greatly strained, and the German army had reached the Caucasus. Within the security structure, America represents the third stage. This stage should not be neglected. It should be constructed. But, it should crown the structure.

You have proposed a tripartite Anglo-Franco-Soviet pact. I should tell you that we have no objection in principal to such a pact. But we believe that it does not address the problem. We much prefer a system of security made up of three levels:

1st Franco-Soviet Pact

2nd Anglo-Soviet and Franco-Anglo Pact

3rd Collective Security (with the inclusion of America)

One point which should be stressed is that a tripartite pact presents some big problems.

Between France and the USSR there is no major point of debate. With Great Britain we have always had, and always will have, such debates. You, also, have had disagreements with Britain, such as in Iran. You will possibly have further disagreements in the Far East.

It is therefore not certain that a tripartite pact will be easy to conclude. On the contrary, the process could be marred and even retarded by conflicts of interest; the Germans realize this and could combine such conflicts of interest with further aggression. Thus, we do not believe that a tripartite pact is the best way to achieve security.

Marshal Stalin boasts of the advantages of a tripartite pact. The English would be tied directly to France and to the USSR. This would be serious and solid. We would be able to consult one another, bringing England to action more quickly. Stalin wonders if this would not be better. Then he quickly changes the subject.

After all, we can make a pact between our two countries; France must understand Soviet Russia's fundamental interest in the Polish affair. We cannot allow a Poland which, presently, opposes Moscow as well as Germany. We want a Poland honestly

sympathetic to the Allies and resolutely anti-German. This is not possible with the government in London. It represents an anti-Russian spirit which has always existed in Poland. On the contrary, we would be able to find common ground with a different Poland, big, strong, a friend in democracy to both France and the USSR. If you share this point of view, make an agreement with Lublin and we will be able to conclude a pact with you. Churchill will obviously be very hurt. Oh well. It has happened before.

He has offended me frequently as well.

The interpreter clarifies, and General de Gaulle believes it to be a question of a tripartite pact, on the condition that an official arrangement intervenes with the Lublin Committee. He believes that this proposition presents little of interest.

He repeats that the French government wishes to send a delegate to Lublin and to receive a delegate from Lublin in Paris. But he does not want to meet with the Lublin Committee, which he does not know well. France and the USSR have a common interest in a united Poland, but not in an artificial Poland, in which France would have no confidence.

Stalin ends the talks by talking about the flotilla "Normandy" and about the dinner which would take place the following evening at the Kremlin.

Returning to the embassy, General de Gaulle states that Mr. Bidault and Mr. Garreau have different interpretations of Stalin's comments relating to the conclusion of a pact and to the arrangement with Lublin. According to Mr. Bidault and Mr. Garreau, Stalin had envisioned a bilateral Franco--Soviet pact and not a tripartite pact.

Mr. Bidault and Mr. Garreau, at 11:00 p.m., held another interview with Mr. Molotov which confirms this interpretation.

Stalin did offer to conclude a bilateral pact if the Lublin Committee and the Provisional

French Government would exchange delegates.

Thereupon, the General decides that Mr. Garreau would receive the following day, Saturday at 13:00 at the embassy, representatives of the Polish Committee for National Liberation, who arrived several days ago in Moscow. During the course of the interview, General de Gaulle would come to the embassy to see them.