

'Invitation to perfidy' from The Guardian (22 February 1969)

Caption: On 22 February 1969, commenting on the meeting held on 4 February between Christopher Soames, British Ambassador to Paris, and French President Charles de Gaulle, the British daily newspaper The Guardian harshly criticises the French proposal to open bilateral discussions between the two countries. The article reports the reactions of British Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart, for whom General de Gaulle's proposal to abolish the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Economic Community (EEC) is unacceptable and threatens to endanger the United Kingdom's close links with the United States, its NATO allies and the other members of Western European Union (WEU).

Source: "Invitation to perfidy" from The Guardian. London: Guardian Newspapers. 22.02.1969, p.10.

Copyright: (c) Copyright Guardian News & Media Ltd

URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/invitation_to_perfidy_from_the_guardian_22_february_1969-en-45858313-d27b-4cb5-9965-e3776bc35e5e.html

Last updated: 13/10/2016



Invitation to perfidy

President de Gaulle's statement of February 4 to Mr Soames amounts to the proposition that Britain and France should collaborate to abolish NATO and the EEC and that they should do this secretly and behind their allies' backs. The British Government ought to listen to any French proposal which might lead to closer ties between Britain and Europe. But no British Government could agree to secret talks like these. De Gaulle's proposals would have affected Britain's ties with the United States, with all her other NATO allies and with the other members of the Western European Union. For Britain to have started talks about all this without telling her partners and allies, would have been dishonest and disloyal. What de Gaulle wanted was to arrange a carve-up. That he should have expected Britain to agree is extraordinary, and unflattering.

For Mr Stewart to say in reply that the President's proposals were "significant and far-reaching" was an unforgettable understatement of the obvious. A discussion of the President's plan would no doubt have been interesting and perhaps Mr Stewart did right to say he would like to have one. On the other hand most of the changes proposed—leaving aside the methods by which the President wanted to bring them about—were obviously unacceptable to Britain and to many of her allies too. Britain is not a member of the EEC, but even an outsider can see that the smaller members of the community could not be expected to agree with rapture to the domination or even the replacement of the community they loyally helped to build by a "European Directorate" of France, Germany, Italy, and

Britain. Some of Britain's best friends in Europe are small countries. What would Belgium and the Netherlands have said to this arrangement? And what would Britain have said to them if it had ever come to pass?

Mr Stewart did say, in his first response on February 12, that de Gaulle's proposal to abolish NATO was unacceptable, and no doubt this was what the President expected. Britain never has accepted the proposition that Europe can defend itself alone, or that American troops should go home or that it would be right or prudent to dissolve an alliance which holds the line from the Arctic to the Caucasus and which has kept the peace for twenty years. And in NATO, too, some of Britain's best friends are small countries, like Norway.

The President's imaginings are sometimes wild as well as grand. This was certainly a wild one even though the Quai d'Orsay denies that the General had said anything new. What is not clear even now is why Mr Stewart should have pursued the matter as far as he did. He probably was justified in saying that he would like to pursue the matter further but the Foreign Office would not say last night what response Mr Stewart had to the reply in this sense that Mr Soames delivered on February 12. What did the French say when Mr Soames told them that Britain intended to inform her allies in the Western European Union? In the event what did Mr Stewart gain by informing the allies anyway? There has been some odd diplomacy on both sides of the Channel but in London, at least, no one has gone behind anyone else's back.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.