

“Temptation” of super-Power detente’ from The Guardian (22 November 1973)

Caption: On 22 November 1973, the British daily newspaper The Guardian comments on the address given the previous day by French Foreign Minister Michel Jobert to the Assembly of Western European Union (WEU) on détente and European defence policy.

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'Temptation' of super-Power detente

The French Foreign Minister, M. Jobert, called today for a more specifically European defence policy and for a European alternative to a world détente resting on cooperation between the two super-Powers. M Jobert was addressing the assembly here of the Western European Union.

He thought that Western public opinion was too ready to believe that the equilibrium reached between the United States and the Soviet Union had ended the risk of serious confrontation. The desire for peace was so great that there was a temptation to accept anything submitted under the guise of détente.

He pointed out that if it was impossible to use strategic weapons the importance of conventional and tactical nuclear weapons became greater. It seemed likely that the Soviet-American talks on the limitation of nuclear weapons would sooner or later be extended to include British and French nuclear forces. But France refused to see set up in the centre of Europe any special zone distinct from the rest of Western Europe.

The agreement signed bet-

ween President Nixon and Mr Brezhnev in June was, however, the event in 1973 which changed more profoundly than any other the concept of détente, he said. It included provision for the two great Powers to act together to prevent the use of nuclear weapons should such a threat arise anywhere in the world.

Thus, in the name of détente, co-responsibility in the control of crises had been established. M Jobert observed that the détente between Moscow and Washington was perhaps only temporary. Rivalry between them remained.

There was, however, another road to détente, he said, along which many nations might travel together. First, there was the need for discussion between equal sovereign nations. This need not exclude alliances freely entered into, but would provide a forum for the settlement of differences.

Second, there was the need to establish genuine security for small as well as large nations. Each nation must have the capacity and will to defend itself and each must have the

From RICHARD SCOTT, Paris, November 21

opportunity freely to determine its own policy, economic and social decisions, without external pressure. Real security was inseparable from freedom — which was the third essential factor.

The passage from a fragile coexistence to a genuine peace was the price. M Jobert claimed that General de Gaulle had tried to move towards such a goal 10 years ago when he refused to accept the concept of blocks and sought to open up relations with the countries of Eastern Europe. Chancellor Brandt had followed the same path some years later. Other countries had shown their approval of this approach.

It was for this reason that France thought that the European security conference at Geneva, at which 33 of the 34 European States were present, was so important. But they should not limit their efforts towards détente and international understanding to Europe alone. It should extend to all other parts of the world.

Europe should affirm its presence more strongly in the United Nations. Her voice

should be heard more loudly. That was what the Nine had sought to do in their recent Middle East declarations. The forthcoming European summit in Copenhagen would offer another opportunity. Europe had been shaken: she must react.

M Jobert added that the NATO Alliance remained as indispensable to the security of the US as of Europe. France agreed that the permanent objectives of the alliance should be reaffirmed.

Two British Labour MPs told M Jobert afterwards, in a questions session, that they wanted to know more precisely what French policy was on the defence of Europe and on the Middle East, and why France did not rejoin NATO.

M Jobert did not reply directly. He did, however, tell Mr John Medleson — who asked if France was going to press for EEC membership for "Fascist, dictatorial" Spain — that Europe was a geographical term, and Spain could not be excluded from it. As far as Spain joining the Common Market was concerned, he thought it a reasonable future prospect, but that Spain was not yet ready for it.