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FRENCH VIEWS ON STRATEGY

The following is a despatch dated 23 November from the British Ambassador in Paris, Sir Pierson Dixon, to the Foreign Office in London.

1. I saw General de Gaulle today and am reporting on other questions separately. The following exchange took place on strategy.

2. In response to an invitation from General de Gaulle to explain the particular point on which I was seeking his views, I said that I had noticed, in the reports of our representatives in various NATO bodies, that there was a difference of view about how best to assure the security of Europe. I was not sure how serious the difference of view was. The French view, if I understood it aright, now was that the line should be established the crossing of which by the enemy would automatically mean that he had committed an act of aggression, to which the response should automatically be the use of nuclear weapons.

3. General de Gaulle said that this was exactly right. Speaking with considerable emphasis, he said that the French had been led to take this position

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because of the uncertainty which one was bound to feel about what the Americans would do. The Americans had twice intervened late when Europe had been involved in a war. In the 1939 war France had been prostrate before they intervened and Europe had only been saved by Britain holding out. Even when Britain was in dire straits with her communications and the problem of feeding her population, it had taken the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour to bring the Americans in.

4. I remarked that this time the Americans were in Europe physically and in great force. It was surely because they were determined this time not to be too late and because they wished to deter aggression that they had sent men and arms to Europe in peace-time. General de Gaulle said that this might be so, but the fundamental point was that the Americans did not intend to use nuclear weapons. The reason was that with the development in weapons the territory of the United States was no longer immune from attack and the Americans were not prepared to face this. This was clear to his mind from the American insistence on a pause before nuclear weapons could be used. This in effect meant that they

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never would be used and Europe meanwhile would be overwhelmed. Europe must therefore look to herself.

5. I asked General de Gaulle whether he did not think, taking the case of Berlin, that it was mis-conceived to rely on instant nuclear retaliation. In the case of Berlin it might be the West who would have to take the initiative in using force if the Russians exploited their position on our lines of access to test our strength. It seemed to me that the immediate threat of nuclear retaliation would not be a credible or effective response to interference with access. General de Gaulle did not answer this point directly but maintained that what was essential was to establish a line the crossing of which would involve the use of nuclear weapons against the enemy. I asked whether the General thought this evident difference of view was susceptible of solution by a discussion within the alliance. He said that he feared it was not. When it was a matter of life and death, you did not give way in discussion. It was your life and you had to look after it.

6. I asked whether he had considered what the effects on the alliance would be if this difference of view on the strategic concept remained unsolved.

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If there was no agreement on strategy, would it not be difficult to decide what forces the alliance should seek to maintain? General de Gaulle said that this would obviously follow but that he could not see that the question of force goals had any real importance.

7. It was clear to me from what General de Gaulle said that he will not be moved from this position. I shall be commenting on November 25 after consultation with Sir E. Shuckburgh (UK Ambassador to NATO). We seem likely to be faced with a serious situation.