

May 12, 1975

**Record of Conversation between French Prime
Minister Jacques Chirac and Vice Premier of the
People's Republic Deng Xiaoping**

Citation:

"Record of Conversation between French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac and Vice Premier of the People's Republic Deng Xiaoping", May 12, 1975, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, la Courneuve (MAE), Série Asie-Océanie, Sous-série Chine 1973-1980 (AO), 2174. Archival Reference Code ("Côte"): 752INVA/2174. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by Martin Albers and included in CWIHP e-Dossier No. 45. <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/118650>

Summary:

French Prime Minister Chirac and Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping discuss economic relations and technology exchange between China and France. They also discuss the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and issues of collective security in asia.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

French

Contents:

Translation - English

Verbatim Record of the talks between the Prime Minister and M. Deng Xiaoping

(12 May 1975 at 3.30pm)

M.CHIRAC: Before starting our working session, I would like to say again how pleased we are to welcome you and how great an honor your visit and that of your delegation is for us. The President of the Republic and the French government appreciate the fact that it is to our country that you pay your first official visit in this part of the world. For more than ten years France and China have had diplomatic relations, which have become increasingly close and friendly over the years. It falls to us to confirm this development in the interest of both peoples. It is in this spirit that the French government and, tomorrow, the President of the Republic intend to conduct the conversations during your all-too-short visit to Paris. We will arrange the terms of these conversations according to your wishes. It will be useful to discuss the bilateral problems - economic, cultural and scientific - that we have brought up several times with your excellent ambassador, as well as the international problems that preoccupy the world, and which will be the subject of the more in-depth discussions with the President of the Republic.

M.DENGDENG XIAOPING: Please allow me to first express my gratitude to the French government, to the President of the Republic, as well as to the Prime Minister for the invitation addressed to me that gives me the opportunity to (p. 2) visit your great country. I entirely agree with the Prime Minister: since we have established diplomatic relations, they have developed satisfactorily and I wish that they will develop further still. Upon arrival in Paris I have received a very warm welcome that is proof of our good relations. I am very glad about the possibility to talk today to your Excellency and tomorrow to the President about bilateral relations and about international problems. Regarding the sequence I am at your disposal.

M. CHIRAC: If the Vice Premier agrees we could begin with the bilateral problems. On this subject, I should say that I am pleased by the increase in our exchanges, but I think that we can go further. In a number of sectors, while maintaining the equilibrium of the balance of trade, it should be possible for France to have a higher rank among the suppliers of China and for China to have a higher rank among the suppliers of France. I would therefore like to make a number of suggestions to the Vice Premier and I am ready to listen to his own.

M.DENG: I agree.

M.CHIRAC: Improvements are possible with regard to certain precise points. We see these as important not only for economic and financial reasons but also because relations in this area are a good foundation for our political relations. In a number of sectors there are thus either possibilities for new contacts, or possibilities to accelerate the on-going discussions. (p. 3)

M.CHIRAC: Oil and gas: French technology in these sectors is advanced and an export article, especially with regard to offshore extraction, refinery, liquefaction and transport. We are ready to collaborate with you in all these areas.

Construction of geothermal power plants: for ten years discussions have been going on with the company Alsthom about the construction of a 600 Megawatt power plant. We are disposed to accelerate these discussions if this project enters the framework of your economic planning.

Aeronautic material: this concerns the PRC's final decision regarding the preliminary contract signed in 1972 about the acquisition of three "Concordes". This deal is important for us because France exerts itself to maintain and develop a European civilian and military aeronautic industry that is independent of the Great Powers. This is not easy. That is why these orders also have a political interest for us.

SECAM:[\[1\]](#) We have presented it to the Chinese and we consider it very important politically and economically. This technology is particularly well-suited for very big countries, because it is robust and allows retransmission by satellite. Furthermore we have received orders for this technology from a high number of African and Middle Eastern countries. We would greatly appreciate a positive decision by China concerning this color television technology.

Telecommunications: French technology in this area is very advanced and there have been (p. 4) prospects in this regard. I have asked M. Achille-Fould to travel to China next month to examine with his Chinese colleague the existing possibilities for common projects. I would like to underline how important we think this area is.

The last point that I would like to mention is a bit difficult. It is one of the few disputes between the two countries. This is about the problem of aerial transport and the facilities accorded to Air France. I do not want to bore the Vice Premier with the details. Several agreements have been made that seem difficult to implement. It is firstly about overflight authorizations for Air France over Xinjiang that we have not obtained, despite the agreements, while other companies already benefit from this possibility. It is also about the imbalance of paid traffic, even though there has been an improvement over the past weeks. It is finally about the working conditions of the representation of Air France in Beijing, an issue which seems difficult to solve. Since we wish to increase our air traffic with China we consider it of psychological and technical importance that our national company enjoys competitive conditions equal to the Chinese company.

To conclude on the economic issues, I would like to make two observations:

My first observation concerns material problems. Over the course of the last two years we have made a lot of progress and important contracts have been signed but small questions remain that affect their execution. These questions, of a material and psychological nature, concern the living conditions of the French technicians. Since we want to send the best of them to China, we would like (p. 5) these people to be attracted by the prospect of a stay in China and therefore that the small problems especially regarding relocation, excursions...be solved.

My second observation is linked to the equilibrium of our exchange. As our collaboration develops in other areas, it is natural that France envisages increasing its acquisitions. We will therefore be receptive regarding the necessity of simultaneous progress.

M.DENG: I thank you for your frankness. I agree on the fact that our economic relations should develop just as our political relations. I want to emphasize nevertheless that China is a developing country. Also, given the speed of our economic development certain problems cannot be solved the way we want. The same is also true for our balance of trade. Concerning our efforts to develop our country, we would like to buy more from the developed countries. But given our economic situation, our payment possibilities are sometimes limited. On our side, we would like to import many equipment goods and we have many propositions in this regard that come from our respective departments. But how could China pay for them? Such a problem can only be solved little by little as our country develops. This is a provisional phenomenon. In the long run there exist large opportunities. Here is our commercial policy towards France: we give priority to France for all industrial

products that are equal in quality and price to offers by other countries. There therefore exists a political aspect that we take into consideration. (p.6)

M.DENG: I was not aware of some of the concrete problems that you mentioned, but on others I can give you an answer: regarding the passage of Air France planes through Xinjiang, we are willing to accord this possibility to your national company with the same conditions given to other countries. During the conversations the question of a "pool" has been raised: so far we have never used this method with other countries. As for the office of Air France in Beijing, everything will be done to improve its working conditions.

M.CHIRAC: I thank you for your response concerning the passage through Xinjiang, because it represents great savings of flying time. Your decision has an economic importance but also a political importance.

M.DENG: So this question is solved. Concerning the Concorde, the problem is three years old. It will be possible to solve this in the future. At the moment you are still doing test flights.

M.CHIRAC: Regular connections are established from 1 January onwards next year.

M.DENG: We will have to wait until your aircraft enters service; a decision can be made then. Actually in this area, especially concerning international connections we are still beginners and we are not really in a position to face competition. The same holds true for in-flight service. Hence we are unable to serve Chinese food (p.7) even though it is very good. It is because we do not have experienced staff.

M.CHIRAC: Your staff only has to approach your ambassador's chef.

M.DENG: All this is to explain to you that we still have to make a lot of effort. On our side we still have to accumulate experience and, with regard to the French side, we are waiting for your aircraft to enter service.

M.CHIRAC: I point out that they will enter service on 1 January but already from next November onwards there will be the first commercial inaugural flights on the Paris-Rio de Janeiro connection, and the same from next June onwards concerning Paris-Beirut.

M.DENG: The flight time will be greatly reduced.

M.CHIRAC: We have taken the Tehran-Paris trip and we arrived at Tehran at the same hour that we had left Paris.

M.DENG: We will study this problem.

M.CHIRAC: One could almost do Paris-Beijing and back on the same day.

M.DENG: Given the existing means of communication between Paris and Beijing and our lack of experience, if Concorde was put into service in the future and if there were only a dozen passengers for our planes, we could not make them fly. (p.8)

M.DENG: The other problems – telecommunication, power plants, SECAM – will also be studied. We are also interested in the equipment for the control of air traffic. Contacts will be made on this subject so that we can discuss it with you. With regard to the

living conditions of French experts, the Ambassador has already informed me. There are things that are very reasonable. We will look into that.

M.CHIRAC: This is not a question of being reasonable or not, but the French experts have certain habits...

M.DENG: It is on our side that there are things that are not very reasonable.

M.CHIRAC: I do not judge, but since we want to send good experts, we wish that their living conditions be improved, especially with regard to excursions.

M.DENG: I know, thanks to the Ambassador (M. Arnaud) who raised the question; without him I could not have been informed.

M.CHIRAC: To conclude on business issues, it could be decided, if you agree, to have a procedure of yearly consultations, as we have it with numerous other countries. This could be for example a consultation at the level of the two Ministers of Foreign Affairs, who could be joined by competent technical experts from their own departments and perhaps other ministries; they would exchange views on political relations but equally on economic, cultural and scientific relations. (p.9) I am not asking you for an immediate response. If you could decide on this issue before your return to China, we could officially announce our decision.

M.DENG: I of course agree that we should exchange views on different problems. But there are two aspects: the political aspect and the economic aspect. We have established mixed commissions with numerous countries. With regard to political relations it would perhaps be better to do without a fixed procedure and meet at the appropriate time at the UN, for example, or when the foreign minister passes through Paris to go to New York.

M.CHIRAC: That would therefore be irregular contacts, on demand, in a way.

M.DENG: For the economic problems we could establish a mixed commission at the director level.

M.CHIRAC: I absolutely agree. The commission could meet once in Paris and then in Beijing the next time; it could be presided alternately by one side and then by the other.

M.DENG: We do not have the position of a director for economic affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs though.

M.CHIRAC: We could have someone responsible for economic affairs on each side; on the French side that would be the director for economic affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (p.10)

M.DENG: I agree on that.

M.CHIRAC: We could make an official announcement at the time of the Vice Premier's departure. With regard to exchanges on the political level, they would only take place occasionally, before UN sessions. Our two Ministers of Foreign Affairs could prepare this together.

We would like to have more exchanges between technical ministers. Your Minister of

Health, for example, who is a woman, could be received by our Minister, who is also a woman and who I will introduce to you tonight.

M.DENG: This is a good proposition. I will consult the authorities after returning.

M.CHIRAC: This is an official proposition. Finally, we would like to receive a delegation of the National People's Assembly (NPA), who will be invited by our National Assembly.

M.DENG: I will pass on this suggestion to the Permanent Committee of the NPA. This is a proposition that is absolutely feasible.

M.CHIRAC: If you allow me, I will say a word about cultural problems. We would like to increase exchange in this domain, including the sectors of science and sports, as well as solve some small problems. If you agree, we could ask (p. 11) the two Ministers of Foreign Affairs, who will meet, to examine the conditions for advancing these relations.

M.DENG: We agree.

M.CHIRAC: If the Vice Premier would like to raise other problems, we are willing to examine them.

DENG: We share your desire to see economic and cultural exchange develop. With regard to the latter, our two Ministers of Foreign Affairs will talk to each other. Later, once the mixed commission is established, it can deal with the economic and commercial problems.

M.CHIRAC: So with regard to bilateral problems, we have discussed the essential issues. Our two ministers can study the details. I am pleased by the spirit in which we have approached these problems, a spirit that corresponds to the friendship between the two countries. I am now ready to reply to the questions about the international sphere that you might want to raise.

M.DENG: In many areas we have identical or similar positions. Here is our point of view on the international situation. Our world is not a calm world. We have observed concern about the situation, not only in our conversations with our French friends, but also in those that we had with other European countries. This concern is justified. The problem is that the concern and the danger are hidden by certain appearances of détente or security. This is true for the Conference on Security [and Cooperation] in Europe or for the propositions for a security system in Asia. (p.12) I have a question to ask you: there is a lot of talk now about a summit conference to conclude the CSCE. What do you think about such a prospect?

M.CHIRAC: The preparations have been going on for eighteen months and all the interested states have concluded that there will be a summit meeting in Helsinki, probably this summer to try to find agreement on the three problems that have arisen, meaning the three baskets.^[2] Naturally there is no question of institutionalizing this summit procedure but to end the conference. For us this is not a solution to the problem of security and we put emphasis on the aspect of cooperation. We seek security by other means.

M.DENG: Last year, when M. Heath came to China, Chairman Mao asked him a question on the subject. Heath replied: instead of asking when this conference will be concluded "victoriously", it would be better to ask when this conference will fail, because even after its end we still will not know if the conference was a failure or a

success.

M.CHIRAC: It will be difficult to predict. The countries agree on a certain number of general principles that could allow improving cooperation but that will not change anything fundamental with regard to the security aspect.

M.DENG: It is the Russians who are in a hurry to bring this conference to a close to prove that their approach is right. According to us, the Russians expect two things of this conference: firstly they hope to appease the interior contradictions that exist in their country and this is necessary for Brezhnev; secondly they intend to deceive the European peoples. (p. 13) But perhaps the Soviets are following a third objective, namely speeding up the installation of a system of collective security in Asia. But their efforts seem bound to fail because we cannot see who would agree with them. Even the Indians agree only partly. Certain sectors of world opinion might think that the establishment of such a system is directed against China. We do not think this is the case. Furthermore China is not afraid of encirclement. Maybe the USSR is seeking to isolate us, but it has another aim that it considers more important: this is to stand up to the Americans in this region. When the Soviets want to enter into such a system with Nepal, Pakistan (which is by the way opposed), Thailand, the Philippines, and India, one could ask against whom this system would be directed? Even the Indians have not supported it. Thailand and Malaysia are against it and Indonesia does not even figure in it. With regard to Japan there is the further problem of the four islands and one can therefore not even talk of security. The Japanese have told us that if one wanted to talk about collective security in Asia, it would be necessary to return the four islands to Japan first. If the Soviets aim to impose this system by the intermediary of a European security system, they will fail. But even with regard to security in Europe, the Americans might have two ways of seeing things. Some of them see the problem more clearly in every case.

M.SAUVAGNARGUES: From the point of view of the Chinese government, what are the most dangerous aspects of a collective security system in Asia?

M.DENG: It is difficult for me to reply. How can we know if such a system would increase or reduce danger? You would give me the same answer with regard to the CSCE (p. 14). Even if that was 100% successful, this would not change anything. As you have just said about Europe, one can easily talk of security and of détente but that does not change the fact of the rivalry between the two superpowers. It is striking to observe that the Soviets call for a summit to bring the CSCE to a "victorious" close and at the same time they are organizing important naval maneuvers.

M.SAUVAGNARGUES: Do you consider there to be a relative weakening of American power in Asia and is this weakening a danger for the continent?

M.DENG: No, we do not think so. In the past, we have told the Americans that it would not be possible for them to maintain all their positions while the Russians occupied key points. If the Americans refuse to give up anything, they will lose their key points. A Chinese proverb says "if you try to catch ten fleas with ten fingers, you will finish by catching none at all." Perhaps the evolution of things in Indochina and the way they were settled will actually help the Americans. But will they draw the right lessons from them?

M.SAUVAGNARGUES: You have answered my question. The Americans have a chance, because they will be pushed to concentrate on the essential points.

M.DENG: It is up to them to draw up a balance sheet of their experiences, otherwise they will fail again in the same way.

M.CHIRAC: How do you see the evolution in this part of the world? (p.15)

M.DENG: That is difficult to say. Numerous problems still exist in Europe, the Middle East, in the Persian Gulf, in the Indian Ocean, in South Asia, and in the Far East, for example, in Japan. Is it possible to say that in the past the Americans considered Europe as a key point? If one talks of two wars and a half, that means it is not a key point. Now they talk about a war and a half. What is this half-war?

M.CHIRAC: How do you see the situation in Laos and Korea?

M.DENG: There have been some changes in Laos. As far as we know, Souvanna Phouma, the Neutralists and the Pathet Lao want to keep the Vientiane Treaty. We do not know the details. We have noted a recent declaration by Souvanna Phouma according to which the situation in Laos could be settled within the framework of the Treaty.

M.CHIRAC: And Korea?

M.DENG: You know about the declaration of Kim Il-Sung endorsing the unification of an independent Korea by peaceful means. We support this position. At the moment the South Koreans try to artificially create a state of tension.

M.SAUVAGNARGUES: The situation in Korea worries us, because it resembles the situation in Germany. Now between the two Germanys a modus vivendi has developed. Reunification is nothing but a long-term goal and all have agreed not to use force in order to change the situation. We would like to see a similar situation in Korea as well. (p.16)

M.DENG: There are two Vietnams, two Koreas, two Germanys, and even two Chinas. As long as this situation continues, there will be problems.

M.SAUVAGNARGUES: The cases are not comparable.

M.DENG: The national problem has a profound significance that often goes beyond what we can imagine. It is necessary to examine these problems in a larger perspective. We do not see how they could be solved in the immediate future. This is also why the question of Taiwan continues to be relevant. On one side there is the continent with its eight hundred million people and on the other side is the island of Taiwan. But we are patient.

M.SAUVAGNARGUES: We hope that this problem may be settled soon.

M. DENG: We have told the Americans that there were three conditions: annul the Sino-American Mutual Defense Treaty, withdraw the troops, and break diplomatic relations. We have said to them that if they did not think this the appropriate time, we can wait.

M.SAUVAGNARGUES: I have a question about the GRP (Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam, MA). We have proposed to them to raise our relations to the level of ambassadors if they agree. There is now a permanent mission of the GRP in Paris and we have sent a delegate charged with a liaison mission to Hanoi, M. Huriet. We have waited for the GRP to constitute itself as a government before proposing to establish relations at the level of ambassadors. They have agreed. A communique will be published on 14 May announcing the normalization of relations

with Saigon, without affecting the Treaties of Paris and of Geneva. We are pleased that the Vietnamese problem (p.17) will thus be an exclusively Vietnamese affair; a situation that corresponds to what our policy has always been aimed at. We are similarly pleased about a development that makes possible the establishment of relations with South Vietnam and seems to suggest that a certain South Vietnamese identity, a certain personality will be maintained. Do you share this perception in China?

M.DENG: We in fact consider that if the North is socialist, the same does not apply to the South. In every case you have numerous contacts with the North and with the South. It will be a lot easier for you than for others to settle your relations with these countries.

M.CHIRAC: I would like to briefly bring up another problem. If we do not expect much from the CSCE in the field of European security, we are nevertheless very active with regard to the construction of Europe. Admittedly, the different opinions among the partners make progress difficult. The economic difficulties also have consequences. Despite all this, following the initiative of the President of the Republic, the European Council has been created last year as an institution to give new impulses. We expect that it will make Europe advance actively on the path of independence. There are doubtless difficulties because certain countries do not share our notion of independence with regard to the superpowers. This independent Europe must have a defense capacity. We are therefore now concentrating on our own defense and that is why the latter will receive a priority in our budget for 1976.

M.DENG: I entirely agree with this policy. Our relations with the United States improve (p.18) but we believe that one cannot rely on them with regard to defense. We observe that Europe has adopted an independent policy in the Middle East.

M.CHIRAC: Our principal objective is the establishment of an independent Europe. In this regard we appreciate the Chinese decision to accredit an ambassador at the [European] Community. As for defense, France is a responsible and full member of the Atlantic Alliance. We nevertheless want to preserve our independence with regard to military organization and it is out of the question that France re-enter NATO. The President of the Republic has decided to make a particular effort in the field of defense, both in the nuclear and in the conventional domain. We also think that this Europe must have a particular responsibility concerning the problems that exist in the developing countries, and, in this regard, our views are quite close to those of China. We have taken a number of measures in this field: the Lomé Convention, the conference organized by the President of the Republic, etc...We are not alone of course, and some do not want to go as far and as fast as we do. We therefore have to be a driving force. Europe can play an important role in solving the conflict between the industrialized countries and the developing world. That is why the President of the Republic has proposed a conference on the subject of oil and primary resources in order to guarantee a certain stability of exchange between the two groups of countries to assure that the poor countries will have the resources necessary for their development. The United States has been the cause of the conference's failing at the preparatory stage. It is not impossible that (p. 19) we might start a new initiative because we think it essential to solve the problem and to assure the conservation of raw materials.

M.DENG: We understand the French attitude concerning the military organization of the Atlantic Alliance. As long as Europe does not establish its own independent defense capacity, its situation remains dangerous. We appreciate your efforts towards the developing countries. The United States maintains a confrontational attitude in this regard and it is difficult to understand their policies.

M.CHIRAC: We do not understand their policies either.

M.SAUVAGNARGUESS: After having largely caused the failure of the conference, the Americans have now come to like the idea of dialogue and they have sent an emissary to the Gulf countries to study a resumption of the dialogue under their authority.

M.DENG: This will not work; one has to talk among equals.

M.CHIRAC: They will have difficulties there as well, because they want to catch ten fleas with ten fingers.

M.DENG: In our talks with the Americans, we have asked them: is the US in greater need of Europe or Europe in greater need of the US? Some think that the Americans protect Europe, but in fact the opposite is true. It is necessary to see the problem from this angle as well. (p.20)

It is only by treating each other as equals that the nations can become real partners and only partners who are on equal terms are really strong. The Americans are not able to stand up to the Soviets on their own. The power of Europe and of Japan has to be added to its own. Once they become aware of this, they will be in a more favorable position. We tell them that.

M.SAUVAGNARGUESS: I come back to the problem of Korea. There is a risk that those who seek a Sino-American confrontation will prefer it in that area. That is why we seek a stabilization of the situation by dissolving the American command based on the armistice agreement.

M.DENG: In our opinion, the situation in Korea will not undergo major changes, at least as long as Park does not use events to start provocations. At the moment we observe numerous troop movements to create certain impressions...

M.CHIRAC: I would now like to let you have a rest before the dinner tonight.

M.DENG: Before that I would like to let you know that M. Zhou Enlai invites you to come to China at a moment of your choosing. When we meet him, we will also deliver an official invitation to the President of the Republic.

M.CHIRAC: I greatly appreciate your invitation and the President of the Republic will also do so. I accept it with the greatest pleasure.

[1] SÉCAM is an acronym for Séquentiel couleur à mémoire (Sequential Color with Memory) an analog color television system invented in France.

[2] The three baskets refer to the three main parts of the Helsinki Accords as the final act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. These parts covered issues of cooperation in the fields of security, economics and science, and humanitarian exchange respectively. See for Jussi Hanhimäki, 'Détente in Europe, 1962-1975', in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War Volume 2: Crises and Détente* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 198-218.