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# From the sidelines to the heart of the European nuclear question: France at the Guadeloupe summit of January 1979

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Thirty-five years ago, on 4-6 January 1979, the French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, the British Prime Minister James Callaghan and the American President Jimmy Carter met in the sunny, warm and idyllic holiday destination of Guadeloupe, a French territory in the Caribbean Sea, with a precise ambition in mind: to examine a solution to the Soviet deployment of a new medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM), dubbed in the West SS-20. Although Moscow presented this new system as a simple modernization of aging weapons<sup>1</sup>, Western intelligence rapidly noticed that it brought a sensitive change into the European strategic theatre. Located by 1976 in the Western part of the USSR, with their range and precision improved<sup>2</sup>, those missiles were designed to target NATO's military facilities in the continent, reducing NATO's capacity to respond to a contingent aggression, or a potential threat. Also, the Atlantic Alliance did not have similar weapons in its arsenal: in the 1970s, theatre nuclear weapons in Europe (also called Theatre Nuclear Forces, TNF) were aging systems whose modernization was under discussion since the late 1960s, but never approved<sup>3</sup>. This meant that a gap existed in NATO's nuclear escalation strategy and, worst, those systems were not part of any arms control negotiation – so that they were also called “grey area” weapons. This was the beginning of the Euromissiles crisis.

Western response to this challenge could be twofold: first, European TNF's systems were to be modernized to restore the continuity of the flexible response strategy; on the contrary, the United States were to include them into future US-Soviet talks. However, both options appeared unsatisfactory at this time: the first one was likely to renew the arms race, at a time when the two superpowers seemed to have finally converted to arms control, thanks to the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT); and the second one was highly unrealistic, as Western powers were well aware that the Soviets would not have given up their newly installed weapons without any bargaining chip – that possibly would have been the American Forward Based Systems (FBS) and the arsenals of third nuclear powers like Great Britain and France. The informal parley held at Guadeloupe brought the four major powers of the Atlantic alliance to take the lead in formulating a compromise that would have overcome this deadlock. Here, they finally accepted the need to modernise NATO's TNF in Europe, while asking the Soviets to enter negotiations for lowering the

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<sup>1</sup> On Soviet deployment: David Holloway, “The dynamics of the Euromissiles crisis, 1977-1983”, paper presented at the international conference *The Euromissiles crisis and the End of the Cold War 1977-1987*, Rome, 10 December 2009 (to be published). Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Politics of nuclear weapons in Europe, 1969-1987: the problem of the SS-20* (London: MacMillan Press, 1989). On Soviet military thinking: Dima P. Adamsky, “The conceptual battles of the central front”, in *The crisis of détente in Europe. From Helsinki to Gorbachev*, edited by Leopoldo Nuti (London, New York: Routledge, 2009). Jean-Christophe Romer, *La pensée stratégique russe au XXe siècle* (Paris: Institut de Stratégie Comparée, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> They had a maximum range of 5,000 km and a Circular Error Probable (CEP) of 450 m. D. Holloway, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Francis Gavin, “The Myth of Flexible Response: United States Strategy in Europe during the 1960s”, *The International History Review* 23 (December 2001): 847. Ivo Daalder, *The nature and practice of flexible response: NATO strategy and theatre nuclear forces since 1967* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

number of nuclear weapons in the continent. This was the embryo of what became later known as the dual-track decision, officially approved by the Atlantic Alliance on 12 December 1979<sup>4</sup>.

As far as nuclear issues were the main topic of this gathering, logically, France should have not been involved in it. First of all, France withdrew from the integrated structures of NATO's military command in 1966 and any decision at this level did not affect her defence policy. And second, which was an incentive for her withdrawal, France refused to be part of a Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) where her word was of a lesser importance in the definition of nuclear strategies. From 1966 on, any Atlantic discussion about NATO's forces, their modernization and their role in NATO's strategic doctrine would have not had a direct impact on France's one. So, when the Euromissiles crisis broke out, France did not involved in it and it is generally admitted that France's general indifference for NATO's challenges and her strong confidence on her defence capacities were the real foundations of her defence policy. Nevertheless, this was not exactly true. Despite her absence from the military integrated command, France still believed that the Atlantic Organization and American forces were the only one that could secure the defence of Europe and provide France with a stable strategic environment. It was clear that French deterrent could not suffice, alone, in achieving this aim: in the event of a war, France could not go alone against the Soviet Army, nor could she plan a strategy without taking into consideration how her allies would respond. As a consequence, France remained highly reliant on NATO's defence posture, as proved the following agreements on France-NATO force's coordination for war-time<sup>5</sup>. When the SS-20 deployment came to highlight the operational weaknesses of the flexible response strategy, France estimated that the foundations of her security were changing. This could have weaken France's own defence posture and it led her to find a way for presenting her remarks to her allies<sup>6</sup>.

This article will show that at the Guadeloupe meeting of January 1979, France was not only the organisational mind of the summit, but a full attendee, arriving in the island with a precise goal and bargaining for its achievement. Generally speaking, this summit occupies only few lines in Cold War literature, and for good reasons: as the recent Kristina Spohr's article<sup>7</sup> highlights, we have few, if none at all, primary sources about it. As we will see, this was the precise intention of the four attendees, who arrived in the island with no position papers, no pre-negotiated agreements nor pre-drafted communiqué. Exchanges should be kept confidential, and they remained so until the publication of the memoirs of the four leaders<sup>8</sup>. Whether the disclosure of some British, American and German records allowed some scholars to work on primary sources more or less related to the

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<sup>4</sup> On the double-track decision: Kristina Spohr Readman, "Conflict and Cooperation in Intra-Alliance Nuclear Politics. Western Europe, the United States and the Genesis of NATO's Dual-Track Decision, 1977-1979", *Journal of Cold War Studies* 13, (Spring 2011): 39. Leopoldo Nuti, "The origins of the 1979 dual track decision – a survey" in *The Crisis of Détente in Europe. From Helsinki to Gorbachev 1975-1985*, edited by Leopoldo Nuti, (London, New York: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> On France and NATO: Frédéric Bozo, *Deux stratégies pour l'Europe: De Gaulle, les Etats-Unis et l'Alliance atlantique, 1958-1969* (Paris: Plon, 1996); *La France et l'OTAN. De la guerre froide au nouvel ordre européen* (Paris: Masson, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> On France and the Euromissiles crisis, two works are worth noticing: Jean-Philippe Baulon, "Au risque de l'isolement ou de l'alignement: la politique de la France dans la crise des euromissiles (1977-1987)", *Revue d'histoire diplomatique* 124 (no. 2, 2010): 163-187. Frédéric Bozo, "François Mitterrand, the Euromissiles crisis and the End of the Cold War", paper presented at the international conference *The Euromissiles crisis and the End of the Cold War 1977-1987*, Rome, 10 December 2009 (to be published). And the forthcoming thesis: Ilaria Parisi, *France and the Euromissiles crisis, 1977-1987* (Ph.D. thesis, defence expected for 2015).

<sup>7</sup> A very rich insight on this summit: Kristina Spohr, "Helmut Schmidt and the Shaping of Western Security in the Late 1970s: the Guadeloupe Summit of 1979", *The International History Review* (2013): 1.

<sup>8</sup> And those accounts sometimes diverge. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, *Le pouvoir et la vie. 2. L'affrontement* (Paris: Compagnie 12, 1991). James Callaghan, *Time and Chance* (London: Collins, 1987). Jimmy Carter, *Keeping faith. Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982); *White House Diary* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010). Helmut Schmidt, *Men and powers: a political retrospective* (New York: Random House, 1989).

two-day meeting<sup>9</sup>, this task is all the more complicated when it comes to France. French presidential and diplomatic Archives are completely silent on this summit and very few documents could be directly associated with discussions held in the French island<sup>10</sup>. For the time being, we have found no French notes or minutes taken during the Guadeloupe discussions, and one wonder if these notes exist and are in the French Presidential Archive or somewhere in Giscard's private desk drawer. As a consequence, most of our purpose is based upon notes written by the diplomatic bureaus and Giscard's advisors at the Elysée, mostly related to the nuclear imbalance in Europe and presenting suggestions about France's recommended position in the dispute.

Based on these premises, any attempt to elucidate France's implication in the 1970s nuclear crisis should consider two fundamental aspects. First, France got progressively involved into the Atlantic debate on European TNF's imbalance as far as Atlantic solutions seemed to affect the independence of her nuclear deterrent. Second, refusing any multilateral forum to express her concerns on these issues, French bilateral connections with the three other conveners in Guadeloupe deserve a particular consideration: there is no intention to diminish the importance of other Atlantic members in the resolution of the grey area issue, but most of the Archives reveals that these were the Allies to whom France spoke to when European military issues were concerned. Then, our purpose will be divided into three sections. First, we will present the Guadeloupe summit, its genesis and its aims. Second, we will analyse why Paris got involved in the Euromissiles crisis and which expectations emerged, mostly from October 1977 to mid-1978, for the Guadeloupe summit. Finally, in our last section, we will go through the two-day discussions and stress French contribution to these exchanges, evolving by Autumn 1978.

## I.

One can hardly question Spohr's statement about the Guadeloupe summit as a difficult one to categorize<sup>11</sup>. If we refer to David Reynolds's classification<sup>12</sup>, we may affirm that the Guadeloupe parley was clearly a "personal summit". The leaders who conveyed in the French island wanted to forge a closer understanding about their respective posture on the European nuclear security issue: even though national administrations were drafting their own policy papers on the affair, the four leaders preferred to get together so that they could discuss personally about these questions. At a time when the cohesion of the Atlantic alliance was put into question by a certain mistrust among its members and especially towards Carter's policies<sup>13</sup>, tightening a personal relationship was the only way to restore each other's confidence. For this to be done, all the four conveners agreed upon the necessity to keep those primary exchanges secret and as far as possible from the public domain to avoid internal (i.e. public opinion's) and external (i.e. the Soviet Union's and Allies') complaints. France was all the more pleased of such a confidential frame, as any involvement in this Atlantic nuclear dispute would have raised critics towards her effective nuclear independence. So, secrecy, informality and discretion became the three key-words identifying the Guadeloupe summit.

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<sup>9</sup> K. Spohr, "Helmut Schmidt", p. 21 (footnote 6).

<sup>10</sup> In French *Archives Nationales* (National Archives, thereafter AN), one may find only one folder labeled "Guadeloupe summit" (5 AG 3 / 894). As a consequence, this article amply benefits from the following archives: Presidential papers of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing at National Archives (thereafter AN 5 AG 3) in Paris; diplomatic papers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Archives diplomatiques*, thereafter AD) in Paris; papers from the Ministry of Defence (*Service Historique de la Défense*, thereafter SHD), at Vincennes.

<sup>11</sup> K. Spohr, "Helmut Schmidt", p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> David Reynolds, *Summits: six meetings that shaped the 20<sup>th</sup> century* (New York: Basic Books, 2007): Introduction.

<sup>13</sup> On Carter's hesitant international politics: Betty Glad, *An outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, his advisors and the making of America Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2009).

Some discretion was particularly required with respect to the other Atlantic Allies, who might be frustrated for their exclusion from the meeting. As far as the long standing question of European TNF's modernization would have been discussed, the four attendees could not omit that the NPG was set up in December 1966 with the precise intent to discuss nuclear issues in a multilateral forum, so that the United States could not be charged with deciding alone the Atlantic defence plans, especially when it came to nuclear strategy<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, they could wonder why only four Atlantic powers were in Guadeloupe to discuss a collective problem. And most of all, if the United States were the major Western nuclear power, France and Great Britain the two continental nuclear powers, how one can justify the presence of the FRG, whose non-nuclear status was definitively ratified with the signature of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1969? The four Allies were well aware that their exercise could have raised more problems than solutions, but the nuclear imbalance in Europe was growing faster and discussions in the Alliance were failing in finding a solution<sup>15</sup>. This explains why since the idea of such a meeting came out, all the future participants agreed that the nuclear issue should have not been publicly mentioned: the gathering in the Caribbean would have been presented as an informal exchange of opinions about the international situation and the renewal of the East-West tensions, without any further details<sup>16</sup>. The Elysée only announced the forthcoming meeting on 7 December 1978<sup>17</sup>, so as to lower attention and expectations from the press.

France also carefully chose the venue of the meeting so as to preserve the informal and confidential atmosphere required. As Callaghan recalled, two options retained Giscard's attention: the islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe, both French territories in the Caribbean. As Giscard proudly wrote in his memoirs, "Since I was elected, I pursued a precise goal: bringing the American President to our two West Indies departments within my seven-years term. Why? Because I want them to be recognised as the French departments of America"<sup>18</sup>. As a coincidence, the other three leaders were already considering to locating their meeting somehow in the Caribbean Sea: Schmidt and Callaghan would have attended the January North-South conference in Jamaica and the American President would have not left the continent, so as this gathering would have presented the façade of a casual meeting. In the end, Giscard's nationalism met with the Anglo-Saxon-German pragmatism and all that had to be clarified was which one of the two islands should be retained. Confidentiality and secrecy could be only assured if press was kept as far away as possible from the "meeting room". The four leaders gathered most of the time at the seaside, in "A big, white lacquered round table [...] under a thatched hut, inside an enclosure made of tatami. Four armchairs with beach cushions. At the centre of the table, four bleu ashtrays coming from Paris, and a vase with bougainvillea"<sup>19</sup>. This could easily give indiscreet journalists their big break: choosing an island would have facilitated security's tasks, but choosing Guadeloupe would have even more simplified it<sup>20</sup>. In so doing, the four leaders were enabled to discuss most of the time outdoors, on

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<sup>14</sup> And the Germans were one of the strongest pioneers of this Group. See: Beatrice Heuser, *NATO, Britain, France, and the FRG: nuclear strategies and forces for Europe, 1949-2000* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1997), pp. 138-141.

<sup>15</sup> As we will see in section III, in late 1978, the Atlantic debate on the TNF issue finally seemed to approve a limited modernization of TNF systems, but this measure required a clear acceptance of the TNF weapons by the European members, and most of all by the FRG. But this consensus still remained undefined for a while. K. Spohr Readman, "Conflict and cooperation", pp. 50-69.

<sup>16</sup> K. Spohr, "Helmut Schmidt", pp. 4-5.

<sup>17</sup> "Le club des quatre", *Le Monde*, 9 December 1978.

<sup>18</sup> V. Giscard d'Estaing, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, p. 357. Also: "Allocution de M. le Président de la République à la Résidence du Gosier, le samedi 6 janvier 1979 à 18h00", adress, AN, 5 AG 3 / 894.

<sup>19</sup> V. Giscard d'Estaing, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, pp. 361-362.

<sup>20</sup> On summit's venue: K. Spohr, "Helmut Schmidt", p. 9. J. Callaghan, *Time and Chance*, p. 544. Giscard do not mention this point.

their own and far from any external interference, which represented another positive feature of this meeting.

As hosting country, France also settled some important details for the fruitful unfolding of the summit. First of all, Giscard expressively asked to limit the size of delegations. As he wrote, “I suggested my colleagues to come alone, without a proper delegation: it would have not been an affair of technicalities, but an exchange of viewpoints as much direct and intimate as possible”<sup>21</sup>. Accordingly, national leaders came in Guadeloupe with their wives and during the sessions they were accompanied by only one advisor. Carter came with his National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, Schmidt with his Undersecretary Jürgen Ruhfus, Callaghan with his General Secretary John Hunt and Giscard with his *Secrétaire Général* at the Elysée Jacques Wahl. At first, spokespersons were to be left out of delegations, but in the end France accepted the American and the British suggestion to have them in Guadeloupe<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore, Giscard clearly asked his guests not to come to Guadeloupe with draft position papers, nor would he have accepted previous negotiations on the topics at the top of the agenda; and a final, official communiqué should be avoided. The four leaders should have profit from their stay in the island to take time to think together to the grey area issue, so as to reduce divergences and to work out a common solution. So, reduced delegations and the absence of pre-determinate negotiating positions could not help but favour the open dialogue highly wished by the participants.

All these attentions for the successful outcome of this summit make evident that even if casual and informal, it represented a very sensitive challenge, but the four attendees preferred far and away to face all the possible consequences of it rather than relying on the usual institutional channels. And the reason was twofold. Firstly, this parley *à quatre* had been wished for a long time as the best frame to talk about arms control and its possible consequences for Europe. The SALT II Treaty was about to fix the approximate parity of US-Soviet strategic nuclear arsenals, meaning that none could inflict on the other’s territory a disarming strike. This implied first a certain European anxiety about a possible American deferral in employing their nuclear weapons for Europe’s defence. Then, SALT II would have possibly brought to a SALT III Treaty that was likely to deal with Soviet and American regional nuclear imbalances, with a particular focus on the European theatre. As Callaghan noticed, “As long as the American and Russian talks had been about their own nuclear arsenals, as in SALT II, the Europeans were content to watch from the sidelines, providing they were fully consulted and informed at each stage. But once European interests and weapons became directly involved, the Allies obviously would want to make a full contribution to the negotiations”<sup>23</sup>. And each one had its own reasons: France and Great Britain wanted to avoid any attempt to include their arsenals in a third round of SALT, while West Germany wanted to preserve the effectiveness of the American military engagement in central Europe, which was her only possibility to elude a Soviet invasion<sup>24</sup>. As the four had not a clear idea of which would have been the next step in this process, they preferred to have a first informal exchange on these issues, so that to explore their respective postures and trying to harmonize them before a formal confrontation in the Alliance.

But, and secondly, the problem precisely lied with this formality as France would have not accepted any multilateral discussion about nuclear issues, especially within the frame of the Atlantic alliance. We mentioned that France’s exclusion from the NPG and the other integrated structures of the Organization justified Giscard’s silence on the military aspect of the TNF question. However,

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<sup>21</sup> V. Giscard d’Estaing, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, pp. 357-358. This matches with the text of invitation letters sent to the three leaders on 6 December 1978, in: AN, 5 AG 3 / 894.

<sup>22</sup> *Présidence de la République* – General Secretary, “Conférence de la Guadeloupe”, Note, Paris 27 December 1978, AN, 5 AG 3 / 894.

<sup>23</sup> J. Callaghan, *Time and Chance*, p. 544.

<sup>24</sup> On French, British and German nuclear policies, see : B. Heuser, *NATO, Britain, France, and the FRG*.

she could not remain impassive in front of the Soviet renewed political challenge to Europe. The fact that the USSR possessed a military technology that the West had not conferred a clear theatre nuclear superiority to Moscow, which at the same time was coupled with his long-lived conventional superiority. In other terms, Western European powers felt that if the Soviet Union had had the possibility to threaten a European nuclear war to obtain some political gains – for example, concessions over Berlin’s status – she would have done so without hesitation<sup>25</sup>. And France would have not been spared from Moscow’s aspirations, as part of the Western Alliance. This was the reason leading the Atlantic members to seek for a united, clear and strong Western response to the Soviet military and political excesses; and this could not be done without France, nor France wanted to be excluded from any Atlantic consultation on this point.

As soon as it became clear that the SALT process affected the European security needs, France received some pressures to integrate the Atlantic debate. At first, the Germans made several attempts to have France into a quadripartite group, including the British and the Americans, to discuss about SALT clauses and their consequences on the European defence strategy<sup>26</sup>. But France always refused: discussing formally about SALT and its military consequences would have somehow meant to declare a progressive reintegration into the Atlantic military structures, and this corresponded to giving the Soviets a pretext to ask for the French *force the frappe* into future arms control negotiations<sup>27</sup>. For this, France always avoided any multilateral forum on arms control, consultative groups included, and any exchange on this point remained bilateral. This was the same attitude France adopted when the grey area issue entered the Atlantic debate. During his official visit to France in January 1978, Jimmy Carter stated in front of Giscard that “we should examine together how far we can go in the tactic weapons field, the grey area”<sup>28</sup>, suggesting that an informal four-headed meeting could have favoured a positive brainstorming on this question. Giscard emphatically replied that France was not implied in this affair and she would not attend such a multilateral meeting, even though informal and explorative. The uttermost concession the American President obtained was the establishment of bilateral talks with “qualified French, British and West-German delegates”<sup>29</sup>, which allowed France to integrate the Atlantic debate at the lowest level, without any political implication. This was also proved by the fact that when the Atlantic Council wished to talk about the grey area issue in its 20 November 1978 session, French representatives were defended to attend to it, or at least they were to leave the session when the problem would have been discussed<sup>30</sup>, as this advanced the grey area issue and its military implications to the political level.

Unfortunately, Archives do not help us in retracing how France was finally involved in the logistic organization of the meeting. According to his memoirs, Giscard had the idea of this meeting first, and even the French newspaper *Le Monde* announced it as a French initiative<sup>31</sup>; but few days

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<sup>25</sup> Minister of Foreign Relations’ Cabinet, “Le Chancelier Schmidt et le problème de la zone grise”, Note, Paris 22 June 1978, AN, 5 AG 3 / 937.

<sup>26</sup> French Embassy in Bonn, “Consultations franco-allemandes. Compte-rendu de la réunion des Directeurs politiques français et allemand”, Note 107, Bonn 31 January 1978. AD, Europe 1976-1980, box 4005.

<sup>27</sup> Ministry of Foreign Relations – *Centre d’Analyse et de Prévision* (CAP), “La France est-elle disposée à participer aux conversations SALT: à quel stade et à quelles conditions”, Note D/597 bis, Paris 24 January 1978, AD, CAP 1973-1981, box 18.

<sup>28</sup> “Entretien élargi entre le Président des Etats-Unis et le Président de la République”, Proceedings, 6 January 1978, AN, 5 AG 3 / 985.

<sup>29</sup> French Ambassador in Washington, “Deuxième série de consultations bilatérales sur la zone grise”, cable 5186-88, Washington 9 June 1978, AD, Europe 1976-1980, box 3962.

<sup>30</sup> Ministry of Foreign Relations, “Consultation sur la zone grise”, cable to REPAN Brussels 559/65, Paris 16 November 1978, AD, Europe 1976-1980, box 3966. And the answer with the Allies’ comprehensive but disappointed reactions: French Representative at the North Atlantic Council, “Consultations sur la zone grise”, cable 3885/97, Brussels 21 November 1978, AD, Europe 1976-1980, box 3966.

<sup>31</sup> See note 17.

after, the same newspaper reported that Carter was its real instructor, according to the *Financial Time*<sup>32</sup>. We know from the other memoirs that Schmidt seemed to suggest first the idea of an informal summit at the July G7 summit in 1978, and Carter promised him to think about that<sup>33</sup>. Then, Schmidt reiterated his question again when Brzezinski, touring Europe for taking Western opinions on the TNF's issue, spent some days in Bonn in early October<sup>34</sup>. However, Schmidt did not want to be associated with the idea of a meeting dealing with nuclear questions, nor Carter wanted to appear as the initiator of such a practice. As Schmidt asked Giscard if he wanted to take charge of this commitment, the French answered positively, so that the German Chancellor and the American President were given some relief<sup>35</sup>. However, far from being a mere host, offering a neutral territory for the three contending allies, France came to Guadeloupe with her own personal interests to defend, even if they were less evident with respect to the other contenders.

## II.

Despite Giscard's public statements<sup>36</sup>, France was somehow involved in the grey area issue since the very first appearance of the problem<sup>37</sup>. A Franco-British exchange, during a strategic group meeting in July 1977, saw the French representative recognising that "The Soviet SS-20 introduces a change because we have not had Soviet FBS so far. Of course, there are six hundred MRBM by now, but they carry out a counter-value threat. The new system, on the contrary, carries out a counterforce threat according to its precision. [...] We should think about these considerations and ask whether the FBS require a new approach"<sup>38</sup>. This shows that France and the Atlantic alliance were on the same line. In May 1977, the Atlantic Council approved the Long Term Defence Programme (LTDP), which was intended to set up nine study groups (dubbed "tasks"), each one analysing one particular aspect of the reinforcement of NATO's conventional warfare capabilities. However, the emerging SS-20 issue recalling the long-lived TNF's modernization debate, a tenth task force was settled to deal with the improvement of European TNF. Task force ten was then turned into the High Level Group (HLG) at the NATO NPG meeting in October 1977<sup>39</sup>. The HLG, directly dependant on the NPG, was in charge of studying the military consequences of the SS-20 deployment and he was supposed to suggest a military response to the Soviet threat. Of course, France was not part of the HLG as she was not sitting in the NPG, and any decision here made would not affect her defence policy. Nevertheless, the military aspect of this incident was not the only matter of concern.

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<sup>32</sup> "A qui revient la paternité du sommet de la Guadeloupe?", *Le Monde*, 14 December 1978, 6.

<sup>33</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principles. Memoirs of a National Security Adviser 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1983), p. 295. Archives seem to confirm: Ministry of Foreign Relations – *Sous-direction d'Europe centrale*, "Réunion des directeurs politiques français et allemand à Bonn le 17 juillet 1978", Proceedings, Paris 29 August 1978, AN, 5 AG 3 / 937.

<sup>34</sup> Z. Brzezinski, *Power and principles*, pp. 294-295

<sup>35</sup> How could one but to share Readman's opinion when she wrote that Giscard "did not shy away from suggesting with slightly self-congratulatory tone that it was he who had instigated the summit meeting in the first place"? K. Spohr, "Helmut Schmidt", p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Even in his memoirs Giscard refused to clearly admit France's role in the Euromissiles crisis, as he affirmed that "We saw it [the SS-20] as a modernization of a Soviet device, and we did not foresee the novelty of its strategic consequences". V. Giscard d'Estaing, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, p. 354.

<sup>37</sup> NATO firstly mentioned the SS-20 in its December 1976 Defence Planning Committee (DPC) communiqué: NATO, DPC, Final communiqué, Brussels 7-8 December 1976. [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_26950.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_26950.htm?selectedLocale=en)

<sup>38</sup> And the French representatives went on suggesting that the question should be kept open within the SALT negotiations. Ministry of Foreign Relations, "Réunion du groupe d'études stratégiques franco-britannique", Proceedings, 1 July 1977, AD, Europe 1976-1980, box 4419.

<sup>39</sup> On this: I. Daalder, *The nature and practice*, chapter 5. Also: Henry H Gaffney, "Euromissiles as the ultimate evolution of theatre nuclear forces in Europe", *Journal of Cold War Studies* 16 (Winter 2014): 191.



French anxieties about the on-going nuclear imbalance in Europe turned into a real unease when Helmut Schmidt went public in criticizing the SALT process and the American disinterest for its consequences on European security. During a speech held at the Londoner International Institute for Security Studies (IISS) on 28 October 1977<sup>40</sup>, the Chancellor stated that, given the respective neutralization of US-Soviet strategic forces once SALT II came into effect, the United States would hesitate in using their ICBM in favour of the European deterrence<sup>41</sup>. And the TNF component of the flexible response strategy was in a dreadful state. For these reasons, the Chancellor called the two superpowers to fix the next aspect of their arms control negotiations, which should have dealt with nuclear forces in Europe and should have ended in a European nuclear balance. In so doing, Schmidt exposed the German mistrust towards the American engagement in Europe, but this criticism was not a novelty. By the mid-1970s, the Congress was even more reluctant to finance the American troops in Europe and from time to time some members openly asked for a progressive withdrawal. Whatever the reassurances from the White House, the Europeans felt a certain unease with these trends and the FRG felt all the more concerned. Indeed, these rumours were also accompanied by some controversial top-level discussions, such as the American PRM-10 study and the consequent decision on reinforcing NATO's conventional posture, which was perceived as neglecting the nuclear component<sup>42</sup>. Nevertheless, the real novelty in Schmidt's proposal was the fact that for the first time the West-German Chancellor went public with his criticism.

This subtlety did not go unnoticed in France, where the attention primarily focussed on analysing the real plans beyond Schmidt's proposals. In late 1977, West Germany was no longer the defeated, occupied, weakened territory it was at the end of the Second World War. It was actually a recovered State, with an autonomous foreign policy, a growing economy and the first conventional army of the Atlantic alliance. It was a "different Germany, with more self-confidence and in which the pro-Western and anti-Soviet assumptions of the 50s and 60s were discredited"<sup>43</sup>. The only question left unanswered for her complete political reconstruction was the acquisition of an entire sovereignty on her military policy. And one wondered whether Schmidt's speech in London was nothing but the beginning of this quest. Or at least, this was the first impression of the French diplomatic bureaus. In December 1977, a note of the *Directeur Adjoint des Affaires Politiques* of the French Ministry of Foreign Relations ended with the following remark: "...the FRG is about to mark her interest in a field in which she has always avoided any engagement. Should this intention be confirmed, a new element, the importance of which is evident, would be introduced in the East-West relations concerning Europe"<sup>44</sup>. In January 1978, a note written before the forthcoming Franco-German summit of February 1978 presented the German requests in the light of the recent mistrust towards the American engagement in Europe and argued that: "Being in the impossibility to access nuclear weapons in the near future and considering the French and the British shelter insufficient, West-German officials tried to obtain the creation of a system that would allow them to define the European nuclear defence even without possessing the nuclear means of such a

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<sup>40</sup> Helmut Schmidt, "The 1977 Alastair Buchan Memorial Lecture", *Survival* 20 (no. 2, 1978): 2. And also: French Ambassador in Bonn, "Discours de Helmut Schmidt à Londres: inquiétudes allemandes en matière de défense", cable 1253, Bonn 14 November 1977, AD, Europe 1976-1980, box 3962.

<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the American Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM) would have been aging by the mid-1980s, and the US were still thinking to their successors as the French military attaché in Washington reported in his intelligence reports of 1978: SHD, 9 Q2 101.

<sup>42</sup> Presidential Review Memorandum 10 (PRM-10) suggested that a Soviet attack would have required a retreat on the Weser-Lech line for then organising a counter offensive. French Military Attaché in Washington, "PRM 10 et la défense de l'Europe", Report 965/EU/AM, Washington 16 August 1977, AD, Europe 1976-1980, box 3966.

<sup>43</sup> Georges-Henri Soutou, "L'anneau et les deux triangles: les rapports franco-allemands dans la politique européenne et mondiale de 1974 à 1981" in *Les années Giscard: VGE et l'Europe, 1974-1981*, edited by Berstein Serge and Sirinelli Jean-François (Paris: A. Colin, 2006): 48.

<sup>44</sup> *Directeur Adjoint des Affaires Politiques*, "Négociations américano-soviétiques sur les problèmes de défense et intérêts français", Note, 23 December 1977, AN, 5 AG 3 / 985.

defence”<sup>45</sup>. This impression was even more confirmed in May 1978, when Chancellor Schmidt introduced the grey area issue to Brezhnev, with the intention to question the Soviet leader about the possibility of having those systems in some American-Soviet arms control negotiations<sup>46</sup>. This move seemed hazardous and doubts about West-German real intents then turned into a suspect for a progressive German neutralization: as Bonn now publicly distrusted the United States’ engagement in Europe and openly talked about military issues with the declared enemy, one may suppose that the Germans were looking for security reassurances by approaching the Soviet Union<sup>47</sup>. If this Eastwards shift was carried through, the pillar of the Western military building would have turned into the weakest link of the Alliance, finally giving the Americans a reason for a withdrawal. And France would have then been in the forefront directly facing the Soviet military power.

But these were only the worst-case scenarios. In the short term, the Londoner speech proved to be alarming primarily for suggesting the reduction of the nuclear imbalance in Europe by establishing a Euro-strategic parity, which was all that France could not agree with. While the Americans and the British seemed to share France’s aversion towards a European balance of nuclear forces<sup>48</sup>, first attempts to clarify the real intents of Schmidt’s proposals with the German diplomatic officials turned to be unsuccessful: no ministerial study on the grey area issue had been previously released for the Chancellor’s speech, so that time should be left to produce an adequate response to Allies’ concerns. But when rumours about the May 1978 Schmidt-Brezhnev exchange on the possibility to negotiating the grey area systems came out, French top-level officials believed it was time to let the Germans know the firm French position on this question. During a meeting held on June 1978, Louis de Guiringaud, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, gave his German counterpart, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, a clear and comprehensive explanation of the French posture: “As regards the grey area issue, the Minister observed that someone in Bonn seems to prefer a negotiation aiming at a Euro-strategic balance. [... But ...] It is only the certainty of an American strategic response than can deter the Soviets. A Euro-strategic negotiation would then include the French nuclear arsenal, a fact that might affect the independence of our defence. Furthermore, supposing that we accept to yield to such a pressure, it is the entire Atlantic deterrence posture that would suffer from this. One should wonder how we can deal with strategic and theatre nuclear weapons in the same negotiation; we think about that; we initiated a reflection and we can talk about this within some weeks”<sup>49</sup>. In this reply we may find the two main French concerns guiding Paris’ interests in the Euromissiles crisis: first, any attempt to include or any behaviour that could let the Soviets ask for the French *force de frappe* in strategic negotiations would not be tolerated<sup>50</sup>; second, European deterrence was based upon the American strategic systems, that a Euro-strategic negotiation would have defended to contribute to the European deterrence posture, letting the continent hostage of the Soviet conventional superiority.

Far from securing Western Europe against any Soviet expansive aspirations, France observed that any Euro-strategic balance would have then created two separated and independent security areas, the American and the European one, each having its own security rules. In a nutshell,

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<sup>45</sup> *Direction des Affaires Politiques*, “La politique allemande de défense et les relations avec les Etats-Unis”, Note, Bonn 27 January 1978, AD, Europe 1976-1980, box 3962.

<sup>46</sup> CAP, “Perceptions allemandes en matière de sécurité: le problème de la “zone grise”, Note D/617, Paris 15 June 1978, AD, CAP 1973-1981, box 18.

<sup>47</sup> Louis de Guiringaud envisaged this possibility with Cyrus Vance during their January 1978 meeting, and called the US to keep any nuclear negotiation with the Soviets global and bilateral. “Entretien entre le Ministre et M. Vance au Palais de l’Elysée”, Proceedings, 4 January 1978, AN, 5 AG 3 / 985.

<sup>48</sup> “Entretien entre M. de Guiringaud et M. Vance vendredi 9 décembre 1977 à la délégation américaine d’Evere”, Proceedings, 9 December 1977, AN, 5 AG 3 / 984. And the note for the Franco-British meeting at Chequers in December: CAP, “Implications de l’accord SALT II sur les intérêts politiques et stratégiques de la France”, Note D/582, Paris 30 November 1977, AN, 5 AG 3 / 996.

<sup>49</sup> “Entretiens Guiringaud-Genscher”, Proceedings, 13 June 1978, AD, 5 AG 3 / 937.

<sup>50</sup> An attitude unchanged since the beginning of the SALT process, as we saw in note 27.

the two territories would have been decoupled. This was all that should be avoided, as Western defence unity should remain the ultimate principle steering the Atlantic alliance<sup>51</sup>. But the real dilemma was how to deal with this question as in the first half of 1978 the Americans and the Europeans seemed to have different opinions on this point. From the one side, the Americans feared that a unilateral deployment of TNF forces in Europe would have even more increased the European governments' perception of a decoupling, as Europe would have had the necessary weapons to oppose the SS-20 at her disposal<sup>52</sup>. On the other side, and limiting our consideration to France's posture, proper European negotiations would have finally achieved the Soviet attempt to neutralize Europe by diminishing any possibility of an American nuclear support in the event of a local war<sup>53</sup>. This would leave the two European nuclear powers in the condition of envisaging the first use of their respective nuclear arsenal to avoid that a local conflict could reach their territories. Following an analysis of possible war-fighting scenarios and Atlantic responses in the European theatre, a note by the *Centre d'Analyse et de Prévision* of French Ministry of Foreign Affairs concluded that: "... these hypothesis strengthen the possibility of a critical scenario for our defence: France could be brought about to consider (in the event of a military confrontation in Europe, with critical consequences for her security) the first use of her nuclear tactic forces to defend herself [...] a failure of Atlantic deterrence would be a challenge for French defence"<sup>54</sup>.

As far as France was not implied in the Atlantic debate, and given the fact that her Allies had not a clear and convergent idea for dealing with the new Soviet challenge, Paris preferred to remain at the sidelines. In the meanwhile, she tried bilaterally to present her concerns in the dispute to prevent any Atlantic shift that could endanger her security. These concerns were at least three: preventing the West-Germans to seek for security reassurances in the East; avoiding any Euro-strategic balance that could dismiss the American engagement in Europe; restoring a strong Euro-Atlantic coupling. In the first half of 1978, Atlantic discussions were no more than exploratory talks, as national bureaucracies were still analysing prospects and consequences on a national level of various Atlantic suggestions. Most of these studies were released in the summer and at the end of the summer break discussions could resume to work out a common position. Nevertheless, it clearly emerged that despite some convergences, minor but essential details remained still unfixed. The idea of an informal meeting could not but vigorously remerge in this end of 1978 and France was now convinced that attending such a parley, taking all the necessary precautions, might turn useful for her own purposes. One might suppose that when Schmidt told Giscard whether he would attend to an informal gathering of the four major Western powers to discuss about this compelling nuclear dilemma, French reservation for such a quadripartite initiative had been already removed.

### III.

As we asserted since the very beginning, it is hard to retrace the French negotiating tactics during the Guadeloupe summit: archives do not help us in our task and memoirs, especially Giscard's ones, had proved to be sometimes misleading. Once again, one may endorse or redress renown accounts only by a closer look into the French attitude towards the evolution of the Allies' posture, which sometimes seemed to diverge from France's security interests. In weeks that

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<sup>51</sup> "Entretien entre M. de Guiringaud et M. Vance vendredi 9 décembre 1977 de 9h30 à 10h20 à la délégation américaine à Evre", Proceedings, 9 December 1977, AN, 5 AG 3 / 984.

<sup>52</sup> French Ambassador in the United States, "Zone grise – entretien au Département d'Etat", cable 4244-52, 17 May 1978, AD, Europe 1976-1980, box 3966.

<sup>53</sup> Ministry of Foreign Relations – *Service des Pactes et du Désarmement* (PA/DT), "Entretien entre le Président de la République et le Président Carter", Note 204 PA/DT, Paris 18 May 1978, AD, Amérique 1976-1981, box 891.

<sup>54</sup> CAP, "Place de l'ANT dans la défense de l'Europe", Note D/650, Paris 4 January 1979, AD, CAP 1973-1981, box 18.

followed the February 1978 HLG in Los Alamos, a fundamental Euro-American incomprehension on TNF modernization occurred: while Europe seemed to prefer long-range systems, the Americans were mostly oriented towards the reinforcement of battlefield weapons, that Europe considered as the American will to confine any future conflict to the continent<sup>55</sup>. The European opposition to these American suggestions and the following resentment for the abandon of the neutron bomb programme<sup>56</sup> induced Jimmy Carter to set up a inter-departmental study, aiming at matching American interests with European needs. The resulting PRM-38, issued on 22 June 1978, envisaged two options: the first one consisted in limited improvements in TNF systems; the second one advocated a hard modernization of TNF systems linked to arms control proposals. The Special Coordination Committee (SCC) in charge of the review process of the PRM-38 recommended Carter this second option, arguing that a modernization was essential to maintaining the military credibility of NATO's deterrence strategy, while arms control measures should diminish Soviet negative reactions<sup>57</sup>. The document also stated that, for the time being, it was hard to establish how these two options should be pursued, but modernization prior to negotiations finally had the American approval<sup>58</sup>.

At the same time, even European capitals released their own studies on the grey area issue. For Paris' relieve, the German inter-ministerial study finally abandoned any vain desire to fix a Euro-strategic balance of nuclear forces, and admitted that any negotiation in this field should be part of the American-Soviet talks in the next round of SALT negotiations. Bonn specified that in the short term, the United States should talk about the grey area issue in SALT III; then, in the medium term, the Americans were to provide the modernization of some TNF in Europe; and finally, in the long term, Bonn wished that Washington would recognise Europe as a strategic element in the Atlantic strategy<sup>59</sup>. As regards Great Britain, she largely shared France's ideas on the grey area issue, especially with respect to the risks connected with a premature negotiation and the need for some modernized TNF systems in Europe, essential for NATO's deterrence posture<sup>60</sup>. This rough agreement allowed the Atlantic Council of November 1978 to inscribe in its final communiqué that the members of the HLG agreed upon the necessity to adopt an integrated approach to the grey area question, but still without specifying in which terms<sup>61</sup>. With the Germans supporting negotiations first, the British opposing this possibility and the Americans still envisaging a viable solution, the Atlantic debate was then turning into a new confrontational phase.

As well as her Allies, France completed her own analysis of the grey area issue in early September 1978. A note drafted by the *Centre d'Analyse et de Prévision*, based upon a document confidentially released by the *Centre de Perspective et d'Evaluation* of the French Ministry of Defence, recounted the genesis of the affair and displayed its conclusions on the SS-20's threat. The

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<sup>55</sup> Incomprehension or deliberated carelessness of the United States? K. Spohr Readman, "Conflict and cooperation", pp. 52-59.

<sup>56</sup> The neutron bomb was envisaged for the European theatre, and at a time when Europe was seeking for an improved defence posture. For an overall insight in this affair: Kristina Spohr Readman, "Germany and the politics of the neutron bomb, 1975-1979", *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 21 (no. 2, 2010): 259.

<sup>57</sup> Stephanie Freeman, "The making of an accidental crisis: the United States and the NATO dual-track decision of 1979", *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, vol. 25 (no. 2, 2014): 336-337.

<sup>58</sup> French Ambassador in Washington, "Zone grise – analyse du document américain", cable 8248, Washington 29 September 1978, AD, Europe 1976-1980, box 3966.

<sup>59</sup> French Ambassador in Bonn, "Evolution du concept allemand de zone grise", cables 3385 and 3397, Bonn 27 August 1978, AD, Europe 1976-1980, box 3966.

<sup>60</sup> CAP, "Groupe d'études stratégiques franco-britannique du 5 juillet 1978 : échanges de vues sur la zone grise", Note D/621, Paris 18 July 1978, AD, CAP 1973-1981, box 18. Although the British had previously envisaged the remote possibility of discussing their nuclear weapons in future SALT negotiations: Ministry of Foreign Relations, "Réunion du groupe d'études stratégiques franco-britannique", Proceedings, 1 July 1977, AD, Europe 1976-1980, box 4419.

<sup>61</sup> French Representative at the North Atlantic Council, "Consultation sur la zone grise", cable 4075, Brussels 27 November 1978, AD, Europe 1976-1980, box 3966.

recent Soviet deployment did not endanger France's defence posture, as in French all-or-nothing nuclear strategy there is no difference between strategic, theatre or tactic nuclear weapons: any nuclear round would call for a nuclear retaliation. Then, NATO's deterrence strategy would have not been endangered too: certainly, the SS-20 could critically endanger NATO's military capacities in Europe, but they did not affect the American central systems' capacity to retaliate, which remained the ultimate bulwark of European defence. So, the problem mainly lied in the German lack of confidence in the American nuclear response by its central systems when it came to the safety of the European theatre. From her standpoint, France might consider two possible actions. First, she might bring the Americans and the Germans to trust each other, which could require an additional American presence in Europe – for example, some Poseidon submarines, but even this could not be enough as Bonn contested Washington's resolute to press on the nuclear button. Second, well aware of all the limits imposed by her own defence policy, France might accept to discuss about those issues with her Allies, especially with the Germans: up to then, Paris limited her remarks to criticize Western proposals, so that "now the question is whether we should go one step further"<sup>62</sup>. A statement that confirms our previous consideration about France's will to influence the Atlantic debate and the fortunate coincidence of Schmidt's proposal for organizing a casual meeting on this question.

The French resolution then proved to be all the more legitimized by the regain of a German-American confrontation in the HLG's talks by late October. With discussions then mainly focussing on details about the TNF's modernization, FRG's representatives repeatedly confirmed their country's will to support this decision. However, when discussions shifted from the technical to the political level, Germany clarified that she should not be the only continental power accepting the missiles<sup>63</sup>. These tensions seemed to recall the chain of events leading to the neutron bomb affair, in which the Americans accepted to produce this weapon only if the Europeans committed themselves to its deployment; and the Germans hesitated to a point that Washington preferred to delay the programme<sup>64</sup>. Developments of the October-December 1978 term added an additional goal to the Guadeloupe parley: even if the four powers gathering in the Caribbean were clearly and admittedly allies, the German-American troubled relations somehow reduced the friendly atmosphere that should have laid the foundation for an open dialogue on the grey area issue, so that this meeting would have been first of all an occasion to restore the two countries' reciprocal confidence. Also, even if the declared intent of this summit was to enhance the Atlantic cooperation and solidarity with respect to the nuclear imbalance in Europe, it would have also been an opportunity to bargain the German approval to TNF's deployments on her territory.

Despite the bitter German-American relations, the first contact of the four leaders in the French island in the evening of 4 January turned to be pleasant and relaxed<sup>65</sup>. Even the first session of their talks on 5 January proved to be so: discussions were mostly devoted to Iran's and Rhodesia's internal troubles, China's emergence in the international scene and Turkey's military assistance. Even if Helmut Schmidt proved in these exchanges his anxiousness to shift into the main reason bringing the four leaders in the Caribbean, namely the nuclear question<sup>66</sup>, this topic was only engaged in the afternoon – and it remained on the agenda until the very end of the summit. At this point, the ideal and relaxed atmosphere that welcomed the four Allies on the first evening progressively faded away. In that sense, we may identify three phases in the exchanges on the European nuclear imbalance. Firstly, Jimmy Carter introduced the US' attachment to the

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<sup>62</sup> CAP, "Le problème de la zone grise: la question et les réponses", Note D/627, Paris 6 September 1978, AD, CAP 1973-1981, box 18.

<sup>63</sup> French Ambassador in Washington, "Zone grise – conversation au conseil national de sécurité", cable 9338, Washington 31 October 1978, AD, Europe 1976-1980, box 3966.

<sup>64</sup> K. Spohr Readman, "Germany and the politics of the neutron bomb".

<sup>65</sup> V. Giscard d'Estaing, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, pp. 358-361.

<sup>66</sup> K. Spohr, "Helmut Schmidt", p. 13.

forthcoming SALT II agreement, asking his Allies to support the Treaty as a further step towards the containment of the nuclear threat. When then discussions shifted towards SALT III and the possibility to include nuclear weapons now affected to the European theatre, conversations entered a second, more animated phase. Schmidt harshly questioned the American engagement in Europe, by arguing that the US ignored the gap in the nuclear escalation strategy. And although Washington suggested new deployments, West-Germany was fulfilling her Atlantic engagement; but she was not to be the only continental power deploying missiles that could hit the Soviet Union, as reprisals would be not long in coming. German claims irritated Carter and the second round of discussions ended on this confrontation. The third moment in the TNF's debate came in the morning of the last day of the summit, on 6 September: Carter, recovering from the resentful exchange with Schmidt, announced that he would introduce Brezhnev the grey area question so as to explore the Soviet thinking on it; in the meanwhile, he would be waiting for a clear European posture on TNF modernization<sup>67</sup>.

This short account of the Guadeloupe talks is intended to present the unfolding of events, so as to highlight how and when France intervene in the dispute to assert her ideas. We cannot positively affirm how many in the administration were involved in the preparation of this meeting. The French presidential dossier for the summit contains some notes by various departments of the Ministry of Foreign Relations, but we may hardly affirm that these notes, as well as those of Giscard's advisors at the Elysée, Gabriel Robin and Patrick Leclercq, were steering the presidential negotiating position according to one viewpoint. As regards the grey area issue, all these suggestions finally reached a common conclusion: the main French aim at Guadeloupe was the exclusion of her *force de frappe* from any arms control negotiation, at least as far as the two superpowers still possessed a so disproportionate nuclear potential with respect to other allies' or enemies' military powers. The independence of French *force de frappe* lied in the possibility to modernize its potential so as to adapt means to aims. Any limitation would mean a restriction to France's ability to defend her territory, and, given its non-involvement to NATO's military structures, this would have weakened her own security. Moreover, any hesitation on this point would arise harsh criticisms at home: Giscard's friendly relations with the United States earned him constant charges for trying to reintegrate France into the Atlantic alliance. De Gaulle's recantation of 1966 was the founding act of France's independent policy and any attempt to reverse this decision was simply unacceptable<sup>68</sup>.

So, far from being silent, France should turn the Guadeloupe summit to her advantage. Prior to the take-off for Guadeloupe, a note by the *Directeur Adjoint des Affaires Politiques* frankly suggested that France should no longer remain at the margins of this affair if she wanted to influence the course of events. It was restated that negotiations would have been counterproductive at this point, as the West did not have systems similar to the SS-20 to bargain and the Soviets would have logically ask for the American FBS and European third nuclear forces – the French one included. A consequent modernization of TNF forces in Europe was preferred by large, as it gave the Alliance something to bargain in the event of negotiations and it would fill a gap in the flexible escalation strategy<sup>69</sup>. This outline proved to be respected when discussions turned to the SALT process. As the SALT II Treaty had not been signed yet, France preferred to avoid any judgment on its content. But, as SALT III was mentioned, Giscard presented his remarks about the decoupling

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<sup>67</sup> For more details: K. Spohr, "Helmut Schmidt", pp. 11-18.

<sup>68</sup> France discussing nuclear issues in a transatlantic frame was simply inappropriate: "Une question controversée : le sort des forces nucléaires européennes après un accord sur la limitation des armements stratégiques", *Le Monde*, 6 janvier 1979, p. 5. On Giscard's rapprochement with the US: Pierre Melandri, "La France et l'Alliance atlantique sous Georges Pompidou et Valéry Giscard d'Estaing" in *La France et l'OTAN*, edited by Maurice Vaisse, Pierre Melandri et Frédéric Bozo (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 1996): 541 on.

<sup>69</sup> Directeur Adjoint des Affaires Politiques, "Zone grise – les options diplomatiques", Note, Paris 30 December 1978, AN, 5 AG 3 / 894.

effect of any negotiation engaged on the basis of the present status quo: since NATO did not possess weapons similar to the SS-20, the Soviets would come back to their long-lived request for the FBS and third nuclear arsenals. On the contrary, he remained convinced that only an improvement in NATO's TNF forces could secure European security for then envisaging possible negotiations<sup>70</sup>. Following the Schmidt-Carter harsh confrontation at the end of the first day, Giscard tried again to advocate the refusal of any negotiation at this stage, but the other conveners were not in the condition to agree on a common conclusion in a so heavy atmosphere<sup>71</sup>.

In his memoirs, Giscard claimed his merit for the final success of the Guadeloupe meeting. He pretended to fix the German-American crisis of the 5 September with an attempt to push for an integrated approach to the grey area issue. Accordingly, he suggested a minimum modernization of NATO's TNF while envisaging negotiations with the Soviets on this subject<sup>72</sup>. Nevertheless, Spohr's research into American Archives seems to suggest that it was Carter who finally made up its mind to investigate Soviets intentions for negotiating the grey area weapons, while envisaging a minimum modernization of NATO's systems<sup>73</sup>, as he suggested on the morning of the 6 September. But despite this nuance, one should admit that France finally obtained what she was looking for, as Carter firmly stated that he would not reduce Europe's security or bargained third nuclear forces while talking with the Soviets. Moreover, the summit proved the FRG that she was the only country still putting some reserves on modernization: when Carter made clear that new TNF systems were required for a fruitful negotiation, it seemed to suggest Bonn that he had to come to terms with this necessity. In the end, this was another positive result for France, who had always insisted on modernizing NATO's forces in order to establish balanced negotiations with the Soviets. Even if the Guadeloupe summit was not intended to set up a decision, and Giscard often underlined that no decision was taken at that time, it finally helped the Allies to reach a common vision on the grey area question and it enabled France to express her viewpoint on this issue.

#### IV.

To conclude, the Guadeloupe summit proved to be a positive exercise for France, as its casual and informal frame allowed Giscard to express the French view on the grey area issue without engaging its country in any decision. Moreover, Giscard's opinion on this topic greatly converged with the British and the American one, especially at the end of 1978 when it seemed that a minor modernization should precede any negotiation on those systems. The Guadeloupe gathering allowed France to support the Anglo-Saxon viewpoint in front of a reluctant FRG, who highly feared Soviets fallouts for a new Western deployment on its territory. These conclusions might be summed up only thanks to protagonists' accounts and revelations from the archives, as in January 1979 French press conveyed a totally different vision of this summit. Surely, it was not intended to be a media event and consequently national press showed a limited interest in it. Some comments had a quite ironic tone, mostly focussing on the holiday<sup>74</sup> and luxurious<sup>75</sup> frame of Guadeloupe with a certain scepticisms on its utility and results<sup>76</sup>. Nevertheless, within this frame the four leaders, and especially Germany, made up their minds on the integrated approach to the grey area issue, which was the starting point for in-depth Atlantic discussions then leading to the double-track decision.

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<sup>70</sup> K. Spohr, "Helmut Schmidt", pp. 15-16.

<sup>71</sup> K. Spohr, "Helmut Schmidt", pp. 16-17

<sup>72</sup> V. Giscard d'Estaing, *Le pouvoir et la vie*, p. 368-369.

<sup>73</sup> K. Spohr, "Helmut Schmidt", p. 18.

<sup>74</sup> "Le temps d'une escapade", *Le Monde*, 6 January 1979. 5.

<sup>75</sup> "Sommet de la réflexion dans un décor de rêve", *Le Figaro*, 5 January 1979. Cover.

<sup>76</sup> "Les présidents Carter et Giscard d'Estaing, MM. Callaghan et Schmidt examinent "les changements d'équilibre dans le monde", *Le Monde*, 5 January 1979.

The Carter-Schmidt frank parley on 5 September was probably the apex of the summit: it allowed the two men to finally put on the table their reciprocal reservations so as to reach, thank to the British and the French, a common understanding for a solution. This was the most important achievement of the summit: it proved that despite divergences, criticisms and a certain mistrust, the Atlantic members were finally convinced that only a united Alliance could face the Soviet threat. This recovered cohesion was then fundamental in years following the double-track decision when the USSR opposed Western plans with all its forces, finally failing in ruining them.