

February 15, 1973

I HAVE SAID this is the year of Europe. . . . This is not to say that we are not placing enormous emphasis on completing the settlement in Southeast Asia and on continuing to build our relationship and dialog with the PRC and the Soviet Union, and our policy in this hemisphere—in Latin America. But the year of Europe becomes very important in both the economic context, which was brought home by the recent monetary situation, and also in terms of the national security context, because of the fact that MBFR—mutual balanced force reductions—will be a subject on our agenda this year, not only first with our European allies but also with the Soviet Union, and also because of the European Security Conference. It will not be specifically military matters. . . .

I have nothing substantive to say at this point on MBFR and the European Security Conference except to say these matters will be under very intense discussion within the Administration, and also between this Government and the governments of our European allies. They were a major subject of discussion with Prime Minister Heath. Naturally, you would expect that these would lead to economic considerations—the problem of trade, which can be very interesting and sometimes very difficult—with our European friends as well as the Japanese.

We must not overlook the fact that tied into all this are the security arrangements that we have with Europe and Japan. The United States at the present time, after going through Vietnam, will hear, understandably, voices raised, very sincere voices, that "After Vietnam, let's throw up our hands, turn inward, and withdraw from our obligations in the world."

One of the reasons I considered it vitally important that the war in Vietnam be ended in what I think was the right way, peace with honor, was that it was essential to demonstrate both to our allies in Europe, the Japanese, and other allies, the Thais and so forth, and to potential adversaries, that the United States is a dependable ally. All the power in the world lodged in the United States means nothing unless those who depend upon U.S. power to protect them from the possibilities of aggression from other powers—which they themselves would not be able to do—all the power in the world here means nothing unless there is some assurance, some confidence, some trust that the United States will be credible, will be dependable.

I am quite aware of the fact that much concern was expressed by our good friends and allies in the world—that we understand, too—not only with regard to our involvement in Vietnam, the decisions

we had to make to achieve peace with honor, to accomplish our goals, which I set forth in my May 8 speech.¹

I would only suggest it is my conviction, very strongly, that in the perspective of history that many of our allies, particularly, will look back and realize that had we taken the easy way out, which we could have done years ago, certainly when I came into office in 1969, our failure there would have eroded and possibly destroyed their confidence in the United States and, of course, enormously encouraged those who might have aggressive intentions toward us.

NOTE: The President met with Gen. Andrew J.

¹ See 1972 volume, Item 147.

Goodpaster, USA, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, at 11 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. This text is a portion of their remarks based upon the notes of reporters present during part of the meeting.

In other remarks, the President said that he and General Goodpaster would be attending a luncheon later in the day at the Pentagon with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretaries of Defense, Army, Navy, and Air Force, where he would receive a report from the Joint Chiefs on the return of the POW's, the progress of the Vietnam withdrawal, and the cease-fire implementation. In addition, the President said that the question of U.S. relations with Europe, including mutual balanced force reductions and the level of American forces stationed in Europe, would be discussed.

A portion of General Goodpaster's remarks in response to the President's remarks is printed in the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents (vol. 9, p. 154).