



Franco-German meeting statements made by M. Jacques CHIRAC, President of the Republic, during his joint press conference with Mrs Angela MERKEL, Chancellor of Germany (excerpts).

Paris, 25 August 2006

(...)

Q. Madam Chancellor, in the light of what's happening with UNIFIL, how do you explain France's change of course? Who should take command of this unit?

THE PRESIDENT If you will allow me, and if Mrs Merkel will allow me, I'd like to add something. You asked, "how do you explain France's change of course? . I've read that kind of expression in certain places. I'd simply like to say that it is completely unfounded.

First of all, from the very beginning, albeit as one of the prime movers behind UNSCR 1701, France has supported the idea of an international force under UN control being deployed in Lebanon. Secondly, so as not to waste any time, she immediately decided to double the number of her troops in that force. The question then arose whether to increase participation in that force. There was no doubt that we were able to do so. We were the first to do so. But you cannot expect the President of the French Republic, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, to risk French troops without having a minimum of guarantees and without knowing how the operation would develop. So the first thing that I had to do, and I did, was to say that I would not be taking any final decision until I knew the more detailed arrangements. I am not saying this just to you, I'm also telling the French journalists: it would have been wholly irresponsible to take a decision jeopardizing the lives of French troops without first gaining an assurance that they would be deployed in optimal conditions as regards security and effectiveness.

I wonder how I'd have been judged if I'd set out like a mad dog without even giving the matter thought or securing minimum guarantees. I find that observers who give themselves to this kind of thinking are fairly ill-considered or fairly poor observers.

We had lengthy talks in Paris with Mr Guehenno, who heads the UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations, then with Kofi Annan; when on Wednesday evening I was given the guarantee that the demands legitimately made by France, which were not political demands, but security demands, which allowed us to take a



decision about putting the lives of French troops at risk, [had been met], the decision was taken straightaway. I think that it is in particularly bad faith to talk about a change of course especially since, from the very beginning, France was the first to support this action and to send troops on the ground. To my knowledge, at present no troops other than French troops have arrived to reinforce UNIFIL.

I just wanted to say this so that certain somewhat superficial comments could be brought into focus.

Q. What are the assurances that you obtained as regards the chain of command, in terms of the speed and effectiveness of this peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon and as regards the use of force and the security of our troops?

The other question is addressed to both of you. Europe is very visible at the moment. Will Europe respond to this situation this afternoon, because if it provides 5,000 or 6,000 blue helmets in a force of 15,000, is that enough to be very visible?

THE PRESIDENT First of all, I'd like to say that it's not a question of visibility, it's a question of effectiveness. My feeling is that the figure floated at the start of the discussions, which was a reinforced UNIFIL of 15,000, was too high because, to tell you the truth, it's hard to imagine how, in an area half the size of a French department, we can have 15,000 Lebanese troops being deployed and 15,000 UNIFIL troops; they would be likely to get in each other's way. So how many are needed? 4,000? 5,000? 6,000? I don't know. It is for the competent UN authorities, and the command of the force, to set the figure.

All I can tell you is that France will participate as appropriate. She will participate quite simply because she has obtained the necessary guarantees. We wanted two guarantees, I won't go into detail. As I said last night in my statement on television, we wanted, first of all, a guarantee about command. I am not criticizing anyone here, but there have been precedents where the command for operations like those conducted by UNIFIL has not been effective, so I wanted to have the guarantee of an effective, professional, reactive command; this requires a military command within the Department of Peacekeeping Operations which is responsible for directing the military operation. Each to his own. We secured a novation, and that was confirmed officially on Wednesday by the Secretary-General; that was a crucial factor in my decision.

Secondly, we made demands regarding the defence and response capabilities that might be given to UNIFIL, in particular in the event that it was subjected to hostilities. Here too we obtained the necessary guarantees, that is to say a situation different from that seen in the past, which was regrettable. On the basis of these conditions, which I believe were essential as troops' lives are always at risk in this kind of operation when these guarantees could be given, I agreed to send French troops. (●●●)

