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NATO - May 79
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(The PM's mtg with
Sargent)

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

13 June 1979

Dear Paul,

General Haig's Farewell Call on the Prime Minister
at 10 Downing Street on 13 June 1979 at 1000

The Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General Haig, called on the Prime Minister at No. 10 this morning to say farewell before leaving his appointment. The following is a summary of the main points which arose during half an hour's conversation.

General Haig told the Prime Minister that the arrival in office of the new British Government had been a shot in the arm for NATO. The Prime Minister said that she had been surprised by the reluctance of some of the smaller NATO members to engage in the open discussion of defence matters; she said that a shot in the arm for the Alliance was clearly useful but much would depend on what other Governments were prepared to do. The Prime Minister went on to say that although her initial reaction to her first briefings on the East/West military balance had been one of discouragement, her considered conclusion had been that the West's superiority in human and material resources should enable it to respond to any challenge. General Haig agreed and commented that the Soviet Union would face major problems during the 1980s, both demographic - as a result of the high birth rate among the non-Russian peoples of the Soviet Union - and economic. There would be significant shortfalls in economic growth, industrial productivity and agriculture. The Soviet Union and its empire would also be subjected to strong centrifugal pressures, as the Pope's visit to Poland had demonstrated. General Haig said that he saw the period of the 1980s, and particularly the years between 1981 and 1987, as being one of the greatest danger but also of the greatest promise for the West and, in any event, the most crucial period since the end of the Second World War. The Prime Minister said that much would depend on who succeeded President Brezhnev and on the international climate in which he took office: his policies would be to a large extent determined by the depth of the resolve which he saw in the West.

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General Haig told the Prime Minister that the new British Government was making an important contribution in the Nuclear Planning Group, where the positions adopted by the previous Government had been damaging: Chancellor Schmidt had earlier been pushed towards his own left-wing but his resolve was now much strengthened. So far as the problem of the deployment of Theatre Nuclear Weapons was concerned, General Haig thought that in the end the Belgians and the Italians could probably help by accepting such weapons on their territory, possibly with an element of phasing. General Haig described the Danish position, which he had recently discussed with Prime Minister Jorgensen, of insisting on the development of negotiating positions for the dismantlement of TNFs before embarking on a modernisation programme as a recipe for disaster.

The Prime Minister told General Haig that the West had dropped from a position of superiority to one of equivalence with the Warsaw Pact without, apparently, noticing it: her fear was that the West might, in the same way, drop from equivalence to inferiority. General Haig agreed that there was no military area in which the Soviet Union had not surprised the West by the pace of their technological advance: NATO's best estimate had been that the Soviet Union could not develop their new ICBM warheads until 1985; but these warheads would in fact be operational by 1981.

The Prime Minister told General Haig that she was particularly concerned by Soviet preparations for offensive chemical warfare. General Haig agreed that the West was fundamentally deficient in this area and that NATO had no deterrent capacity in the chemical warfare field. He hoped that President Carter would discuss this problem with President Brezhnev at the Vienna Summit, on the basis that if no progress was made in negotiations on chemical warfare the United States would have to develop an offensive system of its own. General Haig said that it would be helpful if the Prime Minister were to express her concern about this problem to other members of the Alliance, including the Americans. His personal view was that it was essential for the West to develop a binary system of chemical weapons.

Turning to the Comprehensive Test Ban negotiations, the Prime Minister said that she had considerable reservations about a CTB Treaty in view of the fact that the Russians could decouple their nuclear test explosions in underground caverns. Scientific opinion was apparently divided: British scientists seemed to agree that decoupling was possible whereas some American scientists thought that it was not. The Prime Minister said that she was also concerned about the problem of stockpile testing. General Haig said that he thought that the majority of US scientists regarded a threshold of 5 kts as the minimum which should be accepted. President Carter,

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however, had a strong preference for a total ban and had been encouraged in this by the British Labour Government. General Haig said that, in his personal view, a ban was naive and dangerous. He thought that this problem, too, would be discussed in Vienna.

In a discussion of SALT II, the Prime Minister explained that, although the British Government had a number of questions to ask about the Treaty, she had concluded that the political consequences of its non-ratification would be more serious than the defects of the Treaty itself. General Haig said that he thought that the outcome in Congress would be, not a series of amendments which the Soviet Union would never accept, but resolutions criticising parts of the Treaty but which would have no binding force on the President; they would simply be domestic, political face-savers. Several aspects of the SALT II agreement were, he thought, unsatisfactory; these included the protocol and the constraints on what the United States could do in the field of strategic arms development. He thought that the Congressional debate on SALT would continue until the end of 1979 and could well spill over into the Presidential campaign in 1980.

The Prime Minister told General Haig that the Government was at present considering the problem of a successor to the UK's Polaris deterrent; whatever choice was made, the UK would need technology from the United States. General Haig said that he felt very strongly that, in the strategic arms field, quality was more important than numbers; and that, therefore, the UK should go for a successor ballistic missile rather than for the cruise missile.

I should be grateful if you, and the other recipients of this letter, would ensure that it is given a suitably restricted distribution. I am sending a copy of this letter to Roger Facer (Ministry of Defence) and Martin Vile (Cabinet Office).

*Yours ever,
Roger Larnach.*

Paul Lever, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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