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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

29 December, 1981

Possible NATO Summit in 1982

The Prime Minister has seen your letter of 24 December to John Coles.

She agrees that officials should do some preliminary work on how best to turn a NATO Summit in 1982 to British advantage. She has commented that there would be some advantage in holding a NATO Summit next year before any bilateral Summit between President Reagan and Mr. Brezhnev if, and only if, the Alliance could demonstrate total unity.

W.F.S. RICKETT

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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London SW1A 2AH

24 December 1981

Prime Minister

The FCO would welcome an indication of your views on the value of holding a NATO Summit next year. This letter sets out some of the pros and cons.

Possible NATO Summit in 1982

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The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary has noted with interest that, reporting to Cabinet on 10 December on the Ministerial meeting of the NATO Defence Planning Committee, Mr Nott suggested that a Summit in 1982 might be a way of breathing life into the Alliance. As I mentioned to you at the time, Lord Carrington emphasised to NATO Foreign Ministers later in the same week the importance of keeping the initiative vis-a-vis the Russians over arms control and of making greater efforts over public information, and asked in this context whether it might be a good idea to think about a NATO Summit during 1982. Dr Luns, Secretary Haig and several other NATO Foreign Ministers subsequently expressed interest in this idea, and Sir Clive Rose reports that the subject is now under active discussion among Permanent Representatives at NATO.

For the moment Lord Carrington has an open mind about the balance of advantage in holding a NATO Summit next year. He is only too aware of the heavy and increasing burden that summitry already places on Heads of Government. On the other hand, a Summit might indeed meet the point made by Mr Nott. Other possible advantages might include cementing Spain's accession; presenting the "acceptable face" of NATO, in relation to the public debate on arms control; and demonstrating Alliance solidarity before any bilateral Summit between President Reagan and Mr Brezhnev - a possibility now also increasingly in the air. It is also true that by next year it will have been four years since the last NATO Summit and many changes among Heads of State and Government have meanwhile taken place.

As against that, there is a risk that a Summit meeting may lead to inflated expectations and succeed only in papering over the cracks of highly contentious issues. It is uncertain how long some national parliaments may take to ratify Spanish accession and there is the potentially maverick role of Mr Papandreou to consider. At the least, the timing of any NATO Summit would need to be well judged, in relation both to the Economic Summit in June, and to any potential hazards in the UK defence planning cycle that Mr Nott may foresee.

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Dear John,

If we could demonstrate a meeting of N.A.T.O. before a U.S. / U.S.S.R. would believe be good.



There is perhaps no need to prejudge these issues at this stage. But Lord Carrington wished the Prime Minister to be aware that some discussion of a possible Summit next year was underway in NATO, and it would be helpful to be able to give Clive Rose a general steer. It might be helpful if officials were, subject to the views of the Prime Minister and of Mr Nott, to do some preliminary work on how best to turn any such meeting to British advantage.

Yours ever,

(F N Richards)
Private Secretary

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24 DEC 1981