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DEFENCE  
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MOD.

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

25 July 1979

Dear Paul,

INTRODUCTORY CALL ON THE PRIME MINISTER BY THE SUPREME ALLIED  
COMMANDER, EUROPE, GENERAL BERNARD ROGERS AT 10 DOWNING STREET  
ON 24 JULY

The new SACEUR, General Rogers, paid his introductory call on the Prime Minister at No. 10 on 24 July at 1800. The following is a summary of the main points which arose during half an hour's relaxed and informal discussion.

The Prime Minister expressed her concern over the lead enjoyed by the Warsaw Pact Forces in standardisation of weaponry and equipment. General Rogers said that he was reasonably optimistic that trends in NATO towards greater standardisation were moving satisfactorily; he agreed, nevertheless, that the Warsaw Pact at present enjoyed a significant advantage. The Prime Minister commented that this advantage extended into every aspect of conventional weaponry and into other fields as well. The momentum of Soviet military expenditure seemed unstoppable. General Rogers told the Prime Minister that all his studies had led him to the conclusion that 1982 would be a critical year for the West. Western vulnerability would be at its greatest, the Soviet Union would have a new leadership and the temptation for this leadership to test the West in some area or other might prove irresistible. The Alliance could not hope, by that time, to have made up all the ground which it had lost; but, General Rogers said, he was hopeful that NATO's cohesion and the determination of its members to make the Alliance work, together with the programme for improving NATO conventional capacity which was already under way, would enable the Alliance to weather this vulnerable period.

The Prime Minister expressed particular concern over the Soviet Union's lead in the field of chemical warfare. General Rogers said that he was hopeful that the United States would decide to go ahead with the production of binary weapons, in order to acquire a deterrent capability in this field which was at present lacking. Moreover, existing stocks of US chemical weapons were now deteriorating since there had been no restocking for a long period. Unless a decision to resume production were taken quickly, such minimal deterrent capacity as the United States still possessed would have disappeared by the early 1980s.

/General Rogers

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General Rogers went on to say that he could not over-emphasise how vital it was for the future of NATO that a decision on Theatre Nuclear Forces should be taken before the end of 1979. On this issue, the next few months would be crucial and the role of the UK could be decisive. Another field to which General Rogers intended, he said, to give attention was that of intelligence: the Alliance had to decide whether its intelligence machinery was adequate to determine Soviet intentions in good time and provide adequate notice of the need for Alliance reinforcements. General Rogers said that he proposed to examine all these matters and to make early recommendations.

The Prime Minister asked General Rogers how vulnerable, in his view, the Alliance is to Soviet penetration. General Rogers said that he had not yet been able to form a proper assessment of this; it was nevertheless clear that, at least in peace time, the US and the UK should be very careful about what information they released to NATO as a whole.

General Rogers told the Prime Minister that it would, in his view, be wrong to underestimate the economic and demographic problems of the Soviet Union and the impact which these clearly had on the morale of the Soviet armed forces and on that of her allies. He congratulated the Prime Minister on the very favourable impact which the Government's policies had already produced on the morale of the Armed Services in the UK.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Roger Facer (Ministry of Defence) and Martin Vile (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever,

Bryan Cartledge.

Paul Lever, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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