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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

6 July 1981

Dear Brian,

Thank you for your letter of 30 June 1981 about the proposed defence briefing for members of the Opposition.

I have consulted the Prime Minister again, and she agrees with Mr Nott that we should offer a NATO briefing in, say, October.

She thinks it a good idea that Ministers, besides your Secretary of State and herself, should also receive the briefing but she has reservations about including them in the briefing for members of the Opposition. She thinks that to do so might reduce the usefulness of any question and answer or discussion period which will follow the briefing. She would therefore like to have two separate briefings on the same day, one for members of the Opposition at which she and Mr Nott would also be present and the other for a number of senior Ministers. She would be grateful if Mr Nott would now go ahead and make the necessary arrangements.

Finally, is there any reason why the Prime Minister should not now reply to Mr Steel letting him know it is proposed to arrange a NATO briefing for him and Mr Foot in the autumn and saying that we will be in touch later about the details? She will need to write to Mr Foot at the same time letting him know what is proposed and inviting him to attend the briefing.

Yours sincerely,

Anne Whitmore.

Brian Norbury Esq.,
Ministry of Defence.

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PRIME MINISTER

Intelligence Briefing for Opposition Members

When Mr. Nott let you have advice on Mr. David Steel's request for an intelligence briefing, you agreed that the briefing should be on Privy Councillor terms, and that it should be given by a NATO team rather than a national one. You also said that you would prefer the briefing to take place this month rather than leave it over until the autumn.

I subsequently consulted the Ministry of Defence to see whether they could assemble the NATO briefing team in July, and this has produced the attached letter from Mr. Nott's office. This reports that if we want the NATO team, the briefing will have to be after the Summer Recess.

Mr. Nott is also recommending that the audience for the briefing should be widened to include not only Mr. Foot and Mr. Steel, but also a number of Ministers. I must say that I have some reservations about this proposal. I can see the merit of killing several birds with one stone, but I should have thought that it might make for a pretty awkward question and answer or discussion period after the briefing itself if we had both Mr. Foot and a number of Ministers there (an objection which I don't think applies if the Government was represented by only you and Mr. Nott).

Agree that the briefing should now be held in October?
Do you wish to have Ministers besides you and Mr. Nott present?

After Autumn

It is a good idea to limit Ministers but for the record you might, that briefing should be done separately. Possibly the same day.

3 July, 1981.

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