



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
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19th February 1981

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 Prime Minister -

Dear Michael,

I am slightly baffled by this letter, as by the attached telegram (para 2). At your meeting on 10 Feb I clearly understood both Lord Carrington & the NATO to agree that the Review would never get off the ground & was not the best way to achieve our objectives. They A REVIEW OF NATO do not seem to have lost their spirits!

You may have shown the Prime Minister Washington Telegram 580 reporting, inter alios, that the note on the NATO Review which the Prime Minister - your letter to me of 16th February - agreed should be given to the Americans this week had a mixed reception. *mt*
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This reception clearly reflected some substantive worries on the Americans' part. But it also stemmed partly from the fact that the American administration still has a great deal of thinking to do in working out its own views about the way in which Alliance problems (which are clearly acknowledged in Washington) should be tackled.

As you know, my Secretary of State had some reservations about the proposal of a NATO Review as originally put forward, but he believes that there would be merit in keeping the idea alive if only to give us as wide a range of options as possible. It is clear that there would be no prospect of getting American support - which would be crucial - for an early initiative. Any idea of a launch as early as this May must, therefore, be regarded as unreal but my Secretary of State believes that if we continue over the coming months to think the issues through with the Americans we could subsequently arrive at some more common definition of the end result we would both like to achieve. We would then have a much better chance of getting proposals off the ground.

My Secretary of State believes therefore that the above should be the basis on which we carry forward discussions with the Americans on this issue, both during the Prime Minister's visit to Washington and subsequently. The briefs for the Prime Minister's visit are being revised accordingly.

M O'D B Alexander Esq



I am sending copies of this letter to Francis Richards (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever
Brian Norbury

(B M NORBURY)

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DESKBY 190830Z
FM WASHINGTON 190025Z FEB 81
TO IMMEDIATE FCO
TELEGRAM NO 580 OF 18 FEBRUARY
INFO MODUK (FOR PUS AND DUSP)

FROM PATRICK MOBERLY

POLITICO/MILITARY CONTACTS WITH US ADMINISTRATION

1. IN THE COURSE OF CALLS AT THE STATE DEPARTMENT, PENTAGON AND NSC YESTERDAY AND TODAY, QUINLAN AND I WERE GIVEN A NUMBER OF POINTERS TO THE NEW ADMINISTRATION'S THINKING ON DEFENCE AND ARMS CONTROL ISSUES. IT IS CLEAR THAT THERE HAS NOT BEEN TIME YET FOR FIRM POSITIONS TO EMERGE. A GOOD MANY DIFFERENT IDEAS WERE EXPRESSED NOT ALL OF WHICH MAY BE ADOPTED AS POLICY ONCE ALL THE STRANDS HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TOGETHER.

REVIEW OF THE ALLIANCE

2. WE EXPLAINED THE UK PROPOSAL FOR AN INDEPENDENT REVIEW AND HANDED OVER A DISCUSSION NOTE AS AGREED. THE REACTION OF OFFICIALS IN BOTH STATE DEPARTMENT AND PENTAGON SUGGESTS THAT THEIR LINE HAD BEEN COORDINATED IN ADVANCE. WHILE AGREEING THAT THE ALLIANCE FACES CHALLENGES AHEAD, THE AMERICANS SEE CONSIDERABLE RISKS IN LAUNCHING A REVIEW WITHOUT A CLEAR IDEA AS TO ITS OUTCOME. THEY ARE WORRIED THAT THE SMALLER ALLIES WOULD USE IT AS AN EXCUSE TO DO LESS RATHER THAN MORE. THERE IS SOME FEELING THAT IT WOULD BE SAFER TO TRY AND WORK THROUGH THE EXISTING NATO MACHINERY. WE ALSO DETECTED THAT JUST BECAUSE THE NEW ADMINISTRATION HAVE STILL TO WORK OUT THEIR OWN POSITIONS ON DEFENCE MATTERS THEY WOULD NOT WANT TO BE COMMITTED AT THIS STAGE TO A REVIEW WHOSE IMPLICATIONS THEY HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE FULLY TO ASSESS FOR THEMSELVES. THIS SUGGESTS THAT IT MIGHT BE WORTH OUR CONSIDERING BEING FLEXIBLE ABOUT THE LAUNCHING OF OUR REVIEW PROPOSAL. WE MIGHT, FOR EXAMPLE, FIND THE AMERICANS MORE WILLING TO LOOK AT IT BEING LAUNCHED SAY IN THE AUTUMN, PARTICULARLY IF IN THE MEANTIME WE HAD BEEN ABLE TO WORK THROUGH THE IDEA BILATERALLY WITH THEM AND COME TO SOME CLEARER CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE DESIRED END RESULT.

ARMS CONTROL

3. WE WERE TOLD THAT THE NEW ADMINISTRATION ARE DETERMINED TO ENSURE THAT THEIR ARMS CONTROL POLICIES ARE SEEN IN THE OVERALL CONTEXT OF DEFENCE REQUIREMENTS AND AS FORMING A COHERENT WHOLE. LINKAGE WITH SOVIET BEHAVIOUR IN OTHER FIELDS WAS STRESSED. ALSO THERE WAS SOME CONCERN THAT THE TINF PRECEDENT MEANT THAT EVERY TIME NATO WISHES TO MODERNISE ITS CAPABILITIES AN ARMS CONTROL ELEMENT WILL HAVE TO BE INTRODUCED NO MATTER HOW IRRELEVANT IN

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TERMS OF REAL SECURITY. ON SALT IT WAS MUCH TOO EARLY FOR U.S. OFFICIALS TO BE SURE ABOUT NEXT STEPS. THE MAIN POSSIBILITIES WERE SAID TO BE AMENDING THE SALT II TREATY, A RADICAL NEW TREATY WITH DEEP CUTS, OR A FAIRLY FLEXIBLE AGREEMENT ALLOWING EACH SIDE CONSIDERABLE FREEDOM. IT WOULD BE SEVERAL YEARS BEFORE NEW STRATEGIC PROGRAMMES GIVE THE AMERICANS MUCH LEVERAGE IN NEGOTIATION. ON TNF THE NATO TWO-TRACK DECISION (MODERNISATION AND ARMS CONTROL) IS ACCEPTED. BUT THERE ARE DOUBTS AS TO WHETHER THE CURRENT TNF NEGOTIATING POSITION IS AS GOOD AS IT COULD BE FOR THE ALLIANCE AND IN RELATION TO OTHER UNITED STATES OBJECTIVES IN ARMS CONTROL. THE NEW ADMINISTRATION DO NOT WISH TO BE RUSHED. THE SAME GOES FOR CTB. THEY ARE DISPOSED TO QUESTION WHETHER THE CTB IS FUNDAMENTALLY IN US SECURITY INTERESTS. BUT THEY DO NOT REGARD THIS AS A PRIORITY ISSUE AND WILL TAKE THEIR TIME BEFORE REACHING CONCLUSIONS E.G. ABOUT PROCEEDING TO RATIFY THE EXISTING US-SOVIET THRESHOLD TREATY.

SOUTH WEST ASIA

4. THE TENDENCY TO LOOK AFRESH AT DEFENCE ISSUES IS NOWHERE MORE EVIDENT THAN WITH THE RAPID DEPLOYMENT FORCE. THERE IS A STRONG SENSE OF WISHING TO MOVE TO AN INCREASED US MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST BUT NO AGREED VIEW AS TO HOW TO ACHIEVE IT. EACH OFFICIAL HAS HIS OWN IDEAS ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE RDF AND HOW FAR BASING IN THE AREA WOULD BE MILITARILY DESIRABLE OR POLITICALLY ACCEPTABLE. IT MAY BE SEVERAL MONTHS BEFORE THESE ISSUES ARE RESOLVED. MEANWHILE THE BRITISH DEFENCE CONTRIBUTION IN THE AREA IS HIGHLY VALUED BY THE NEW ADMINISTRATION NOT ONLY BECAUSE IT IS SEEN AS HELPFUL WITH THE REGIONAL COUNTRIES BUT ALSO BECAUSE IT DEMONSTRATES TO CONGRESS THAT THE UNITED STATES IS NOT ALONE IN DEFENDING WESTERN INTERESTS.

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