(2)

Prime Minister
Confirmation of your own impressions.
17/3

MO 25/2/14/2

PRIME MINISTER

VISIT TO WASHINGTON

The Chief of the Defence Staff and I made what I believe was a very useful short, working, visit to Washington last week. We had 2½ hours formal discussion with Caspar Weinberger, and his deputy, Frank Carlucci, and about an hour with Al Haig; I also met three or four Senators on The Hill.

2. I found the Americans, in the wake of your own visit to President Reagan, extremely welcoming and receptive. Mr Weinberger could not, I think, have made more clear than he did the anxiety of the new Administration to work closely with us in the defence field. On general policy issues, we agreed that the Alliance could hardly abandon the 3% target, but that we should concentrate more attention on output and on how to improve the Alliance's operational capabilities overall (and not only in order to avoid unnecessary squabbling within NATO about who was or was not meeting a precise financial target); that arms control must go hand in hand with measures to improve our capabilities (I explained to him the very real concern which the other European members of NATO feel about this, and Mr Weinberger confirmed that this had indeed been the message Mr Genscher had given to Mr Haig and himself the previous day); and that the utmost tact was needed by the United States in its dealings with, and within, the Alliance. Mr Weinberger has clearly taken on board the need to proceed on ERW with great circumspection.


3. On the Rapid Deployment Force we had a useful exchange of ideas and views (as did, more fully, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Terence Lewin with General Jones, the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff); I re-emphasised our full political support for the broad ideas the Americans have, and our offer of limited military help.

4. Following on from your own discussions with him I was able to confirm with Mr Weinberger our strong desire for a greater reciprocity on the purchase of defence equipment; he appeared to have taken your message on this very much to heart. He confirmed his goodwill in this respect, and also that he had put proposals to the US Congress to fund both the AV8B and the JP233 programmes.

5. Mr Haig opened my meeting with him by warmly congratulating the British Government on our decision to maintain an independent strategic deterrent; earlier in the day Mr Weinberger had undertaken to keep us very closely in touch with the development of American work on the Trident programme and had recognised our concern about commonality in respect of our own Trident plans. Mr Haig also confirmed what Mr Weinberger had said about the Americans' understanding of need for a positive stance on arms control. On the idea of an independent review of NATO, Mr Haig made it clear that he thought that a special initiative at this juncture might "screw up" defence planning but we agreed, consistently with my discussions earlier in the day, that the 3% target needed handling carefully within the Alliance. We also discussed the efforts towards the solution of Arab/Israeli problems and I will be letting the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary see the record of our talks.

6. I hope to see Mr Weinberger briefly in London when he is on his way to the meeting of the Nuclear Planning Group in Bonn in


early April. Meantime I hope I have established the basis for a good working relationship in the future with what I found an impressive team.

7. I am sending copies of this minute to the other members of OD and the Secretary of State for Industry; and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

SW

Ministry of Defence

17th March 1981

CONFIDENTIAL

Defence

Clerk

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

19 March 1981

DEFENCE SECRETARY'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON

The Prime Minister has seen and taken note of your Secretary of State's minute to her of 17 March about his visit to Washington.

M. O'D. B. ALEXANDER

B. M. Norbury, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence.

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