



PM/84/153

PRIME MINISTERNato Strategy

1. I have been reflecting on the papers prepared for your Seminar at Chequers. You may find it helpful to have my thoughts about some of the questions we could usefully focus on, among those identified at the end of the MOD paper.

2. The paper demonstrates convincingly that NATO strategy is still valid. No credible alternative has yet been advanced. At the same time the continuing political cohesion of the Alliance is imperative if the Russians are to remain convinced of Western determination and will to resist any aggression. Recently there has been an increasing tendency for some allies to opt out of key aspects of NATO strategy, particularly over nuclear weapons. We therefore need - together with the other "sound" partners - to work hard to keep the backsliders on the rails.

3. I also agree strongly that the credibility of all three major components of NATO strategy will continue to depend crucially on the health of transatlantic relations and the American dimension. It will remain a key Soviet objective to alienate Western Europe from the United States. The lack of touch in Washington over public statements on Alliance affairs has sometimes made their task easier. From this side of the Atlantic we have not done enough to convince the American Congress and public opinion that Europe shares American objectives for the Alliance as well as its burdens. We need to reaffirm the importance we attach to transatlantic ties. We must show that Senator Nunn's concerns are taken seriously. We ought to think further about how to achieve all that more effectively.

/ 4. The need



4. The need for us to hold firm is reinforced by the recent Labour document on defence: if such thinking were to gain ground, particularly within a major ally like the UK, it could destroy the political consensus in the Alliance. This makes it important to us to stick to our guns and go on presenting the basic arguments.

5. If there are short term weaknesses in NATO capabilities, it should obviously be an immediate priority to put these right. Some of the critical shortcomings that most concern NATO military commanders seem often to lie in relatively prosaic areas such as reserves, munition stocks and aircraft shelters. Not all of these problems are prohibitively expensive to resolve. So much the better. We should put them right. As for longer term improvements, particularly in conventional forces, we cannot be complacent when SACEUR and SACLANT warn of their reduced ability to fulfil conventional missions, in the light of Soviet force improvements and doctrinal changes. The problem is to reconcile this advice from our military men with the obvious resource constraints.

6. Over the horizon, emerging technology and new tactical concepts may help to reduce pressure, should deterrence fail, to take early or hasty decisions on escalation. All the signs are that some of these new technologies will be very expensive and will probably be matched by equivalent efforts from the other side. My guess is that they will not revolutionise NATO's fortunes or offer a way out of the political dilemma over nuclear weapons. The proposal for a NATO review directed by Peter Carrington to assess the need and scope for conventional force enhancements is very relevant to this issue. Michael Heseltine and I will be thinking about how to take this forward.

/ 7. As to



7. As to nuclear weapons themselves, we have won the initial debate over cruise deployment in the UK and perhaps more widely, but the real antidote to current popular anxieties would be visible progress on the arms control front, preferably set within the wider context of improved East/West relations.

8. A break through on arms control will sooner or later prove essential - to both sides - if defence spending is not to break our economic backs. Sustained public emphasis on the seriousness of our commitment to arms control is, in any case, a key part of the political case we have to get across.

9. It is worth making two points about the case we have to present. First, I was struck on re-reading NATO's basic text on flexible response (MC 14/3) by how well it has stood the test of time as a prescription for our defence. I think we should consider proposing that it should be declassified and published by the Alliance. This would help to dispel much of the current misunderstanding about NATO strategy and to underline its unambiguously defensive character. Second, and at a more practical level, I suspect that NATO is vulnerable to criticism on so called battle field nuclear weapons. NATO Ministers took an important first step with the reductions announced last year at Montebello. But there is a case for going further, as Michael Heseltine's paper admits. I should like to see a critical examination of the need to retain these, particularly nuclear artillery.

/ 10. Turning



10. Turning to Britain's role within the Alliance, we need to follow up your paper to Heads of State and Government about the future of Europe and strengthening the European Pillar of the Alliance. Since France and Germany are so central in their different ways to the effectiveness of NATO strategy, the heart of the matter remains how far Britain and those two can move forward together (though I recognise that Italy is important). You know of my concern that Britain should not be pushed to the sidelines by the burgeoning Franco/German security dialogue. Peter Carrington has told me of his similar concern that in NATO, as he finds it on his return, Britain seems to count for less than she should. If we are to re-establish a central role - as we must - that will mean more than just working for good personal relations with our French and German counterparts (important though that is). Somehow we need to try to identify how Britain could provide a new political impulse in the defence/security field, that Paris and Bonn - as well as Washington - would plainly recognise as such.

11. Ideas of this kind are more in Michael Heseltine's province than in mine: and I have had no chance to discuss the subject with him. But here are a few examples of the kind of specific ideas we might want to have looked at.

- should we consider whether current understandings with France on harmonising operational patterns of attack submarines could be extended to SSBNS?
- should we look at how far we might formalise with France reciprocal use of our respective out of area defence facilities without reducing national freedom of action?
- should we tempt the French into closer discussions of joint military command arrangements for a crisis in Berlin?

/ - could we



- could we propose to the Germans that we conduct a joint examination at military staff level of practical measures to bring French conventional forces more closely into cooperation with other major allies on the central front?
- could we persuade the Germans to contribute to out of area peace keeping operations within the framework of a future European peace keeping force?
- should we make more to the Germans of the role that RAF strike aircraft, based in Germany with British nuclear weapons, play in reinforcing extended nuclear deterrence for Europe?

I emphasise that these are only examples. They may not be ideal. They may not even be right. But I hope they indicate the kind of thing I have in mind.

12. I apologise for burdening you with another - rather discursive - piece of paper, which I have had to finalise in the midst of all the goings on here in New York. But I hope my main points are reasonably clear. I think we have the following requirements:

- (i) to keep Alliance backsliders on the rails;
- (ii) to convince American opinion that the European allies are keeping up to the mark;
- (iii) to meet equipment shortcomings within existing constraints;
- (iv) to get the best out of the Carrington Review of Conventional Forces;
- (v) to keep public opinion on board and, not just for that reason

/ (vi) to stay

SECRET



- (vi) to stay in the public lead in the search for a breakthrough on arms control:
- (vii) to reassert Britain's central role with that of Germany and France.

CL Budd (Private Secretary)

for

GEOFFREY HOWE

(Approved by the Secretary
of State and signed in
his absence)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

28 September 1984

SECRET