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SEMINAR ON NATO STRATEGY: CHEQUERS, 1 OCTOBER 1984

The Seminar - a list of the participants in which is attached - discussed the viability of NATO's strategy of flexible response and ways in which it could be implemented more effectively.

Several factors were suggested which made it timely to take a fresh look at the flexible response doctrine. These included the progressive enhancement of the Soviet capacity to attack on short warning, reducing the warning time which NATO could expect from 5/6 weeks to 2/3 days; the increased vulnerability of the process of reinforcing Europe from the United States by sea, given the Soviet capacity to attack convoys from an 800 mile stand-off; Soviet superiority in chemical weapons; NATO's possible loss of escalation dominance in the theatre nuclear weapon band of deterrence; and, more generally, the fact that the flexible response strategy, as enshrined in the NATO document MC 14/3, was now 17 years old and arguably in need of review.

There was, however, general agreement that flexible response was not so much a strategy as a description of whatever force posture the Alliance chose to adopt. Much of the discussion concentrated on the balance between the nuclear and conventional elements in NATO's strategy and in particular the proposition that growing doubts about the credibility of a general nuclear response meant that more attention had to be given to the Alliance's conventional capability.

There was no dispute that the nuclear element was an essential part of the Alliance's strategy. A conventional response alone was not an option: there would not be the money to pay for an adequate capability and it would not make the other side dispense with their nuclear weapons.

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The Alliance's nuclear capability deterred not only nuclear war but conventional war. In this equation, the Russians were less impressed by Alliance doctrine than by Alliance capabilities. In the absence of a nuclear element in NATO's deterrent posture, the Soviet Union could contemplate waging a "limited liability" conventional war. In terms of military "prizes", 30 per cent of the Alliance steel producing capacity lay within two hundred miles of the East/West divide as compared with only 9 per cent of the steel producing capacity of the Warsaw Pact: considered on this basis, the Soviet Union might be prepared to take the risk of losing a conventional conflict in Central Europe if the deterrent element of intermediate range nuclear weapons did not exist. A strategy was needed which provided maximum uncertainty about Alliance intentions together with the flexibility not to use nuclear weapons if such use could be avoided. Flexible response provided this.

There was some discussion of the "nuclear winter" phenomenon. This was agreed to be plausible as a hypothesis but unproven: scepticism was expressed about the statistics on which the theory was based, with regard both to the megatonnage needed to produce the nuclear winter phenomenon and to the duration of the phenomenon itself. Although the possibility of self-destruction, through a shared nuclear winter, might constitute some inhibition against a nuclear first strike it was pointed out that the sheer number of nuclear explosions needed to produce a nuclear winter should in themselves act as a sufficient deterrent without the added threat of the phenomenon itself.

The credibility of controlled nuclear escalation was examined. The point was made that a Soviet attack against NATO was likely to be motivated either by the belief that NATO weakness or disunity made unprovoked aggression a low risk option; or by sheer irrational desperation which could result, for example, from a Soviet belief that the

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United States was about to achieve a total military dominance in outer space which the Soviet Union could not challenge.

A danger was also seen in assuming too much rationality in nuclear exchanges: the decisions would be taken in conditions of extreme confusion and tension. Nice distinctions between the various rungs of the nuclear ladder might not be so relevant in actual practice. What mattered was that there should be a nuclear ingredient and a US readiness to risk all in the collective defence.

There was some divergence of view over the importance of readiness to envisage first use of nuclear weapons. Some saw this as a crucial element in deterrence. Others thought that too great a dependence on first use weakened flexibility. The political constraints on a decision to make first use affected its credibility. It was also divisive and caused alarm in public opinion. This was not an argument in favour of the Russian ploy of a no first use declaration. A no first use "agreement" would in any case increase the attraction to the Russians of a conventional surprise attack. It meant putting the emphasis in public discussion on deterrence rather than on threat of first use.

There was considerable debate on the utility of battlefield nuclear weapons. On the one hand it was argued that they would be useless in the likely circumstances of conflict in Europe in which Soviet and Alliance forces would be intermingled. It was doubtful that the Germans would ever be persuaded to agree to their use. Nor was there much likelihood of agreement in the Alliance on cross-border use. The dual capability of the weapons systems involved was a de-stabilising factor because it would be impossible to tell whether an enemy attack was directed at the nuclear or the conventional capability and thus what should be the appropriate response. If the military experts doubted the

utility of battlefield nuclear weapons, why pay the high political price of maintaining them? Savings from removing them could be used to strengthen conventional forces. Before long the prime military objective of nuclear artillery, namely to inhibit Soviet troop concentrations forward, would in any case be attainable by the latest conventional artillery.

Against this it was argued that it would be a mistake to remove them altogether, though they might be further reduced. They were an essential link in the chain of flexible response. Removing them altogether would give the Soviet Union a licence to concentrate its forces in forward areas, a risk it could not otherwise take. Public opinion did not seem particularly concerned about these weapons and the considerable efforts already made to reduce them had earned little credit. Nor were the Germans pressing for their removal. This was a strong argument for maintaining the status quo. The weapons had been there a long time and caused no real problems, so why offer the Soviet Union a military bonus by withdrawing them? To do so might be regarded as evidence of the Alliance's vulnerability to pressures from the peace movement and would increase efforts to get rid of intermediate nuclear weapons. Any savings would be minimal since the warheads were American. An alternative would be to base the weapons further back, while still preserving the capability to use them on the battlefield.

All agreed that the effectiveness of the conventional arm of flexible response needed to be strengthened. Congress would insist on this and Lord Carrington was proposing to take an initiative. But views differed as to where the priority for improvements lay.

Some argued the need to put it all "up front". It was crucial for the Alliance to be able to do well in the first

two weeks of a conflict and this offered the best chance of deterring the Russians from starting one. Resources should go to strengthening forces already in Europe rather than to preparing reinforcements. The psychology of Soviet Commanders was relevant. They were cautious about getting involved, but when they did so it was on a big scale. This strengthened the need for the Alliance response to be rapid, particularly to a Soviet probe out-of-area.

Others pointed out that the way in which resources were allocated was consistent with the shop window philosophy i.e. priority for hardware rather than sustainability. But as the use of nuclear weapons became more difficult to envisage extra days of sustainability became more important. A conflict was more likely to start on the flanks than on the central front, which again strengthened the argument for sustainability.

There were few specific suggestions for improving conventional defence. Full account needed to be taken of changes in Soviet military doctrine. The possibility of redeploying American Forces out of South Germany to a more central role was raised, as was that of encouraging the Germans to make a greater investment in fortifications. The Alliance must continue to press ahead with new technology. But it should not be obsessed with the most advanced kit at the expense of the rest. More than just technical improvements were needed, for instance improved training and tactics. There was likely to be a particular problem over manpower: in Germany the number of men of military age would decline by 30 per cent in the next 15 years. There were glaring weaknesses in the air defence of the UK. It was made clear, however, that there could be no question of driving up UK expenditure on defence further. It was up to the other allies to do more.

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Great importance was attached to strengthening the political cohesion of the Alliance. Avoidance of war required not just a credible strategy for war itself but a demonstration of resolve and unity by all the members of the Alliance. The political battle, which was the decisive one, was being fought at the present time. This demonstration of will was also vital in order to preserve the US commitment to Europe's defence. A lengthening shadow over Western Europe of Soviet military superiority could lead to the establishment of a Soviet droit de regard over Western European policies and to a Soviet victory over the Alliance without a battle being fought. But if the political cohesion and confidence of the Alliance were to be maintained its military strategy, too, had to be credible and on two levels - those of its efficacy for the conduct of war and of its political cogency in time of peace. Particular attention was needed to the weaker brethren on the flanks.

It was as important to carry public opinion in the Alliance. Some thought that support for NATO in public opinion was as strong today as at any time in the Alliance's history. Others saw a risk of 'generational slip', because many of the issues and circumstances which originally shaped the Alliance seemed less relevant now. The problem was most acute in relation to the nuclear arm of deterrence. More needed to be done to bring home how dreadful conventional war would be and the role of the nuclear deterrent in preventing it. This could be done by portraying CND as 'conventional warmongers'. One should highlight the dangers of failure to deter rather than the risks of the deterrent. But a commitment to arms control was a necessary part of this.

Discussion of the role of chemical weapons was inconclusive. It was argued on the one hand that there was a tendency to over-estimate the military utility of such

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weapons. They were indiscriminating and therefore difficult to use. There was evidence that the Russians were interested in negotiating a ban. The Americans should be pressed to modify the verification measures they were demanding.

Others thought that, if a ban could not be negotiated quickly, the Alliance had no alternative but to acquire a chemical weapons capability of its own as a deterrent to Soviet use of such weapons. It was more credible to have a chemical deterrent to chemical weapons than to rely upon a nuclear one. This was an unfinished discussion.

It was pointed out that the main risk of conflict lay in Soviet probing of Western interests outside the main NATO area. This argued for a conventional capability able to undertake out of area operations. At the moment too much was left to the Americans. It was pointed out, however, that this would not be a NATO capability as such but one possessed by certain NATO members. The main scope for improvement lay in improved coordination of their activities.

There was some discussion of France's role, with the feeling that while France would not become reintegrated in the military structure of the Alliance, she was moving towards closer military cooperation, particularly with Germany. It was suggested that France's nuclear strategy was not credible even to the French military themselves.

No formal conclusions were drawn. But the Prime Minister noted a number of points which were not disputed. The concept of flexible response would remain viable and credible so long as the Alliance retained the full range of capabilities, including a nuclear capability, needed to defend itself and the will to use them. But the cohesion of the Alliance remained a worry. There was a risk of

complacency about the situation on the flanks, about the Alliance's ability to reinforce the central front and sustain a long campaign, as well as about the absence of an Alliance capability for chemical warfare. There was no doubt that there would be pressure from the Americans to strengthen its conventional capability. But there were financial constraints for the UK in any further increases in spending on defence. There had been no consensus as to where this strengthening was most urgently needed or whether changes in the nature of the UK contribution were desirable.

At the subsequent restricted session attended by Ministers and officials only, discussion focussed on the Foreign Secretary's minute of 28 September, and in particular the implications for Britain of greater Franco-German cooperation.

The feeling was expressed that the UK was not getting credit for its contribution to Europe's defence; that the Germans had to be made to realise how much we did for them and that our contribution was vulnerable unless it produced more consideration for our political and financial interests; that Franco-German collaboration was giving France an undesirable hold over the FRG in a wide area of European affairs; that there was a growing instinct on the part of the US to look to France and Germany for discussion of Alliance matters; and that France derived unjustifiably large benefits from its fractional involvement in the NATO infrastructure programme. It was noted that France liked to keep Germany in a posture of penance and that the Germans for their part did not seem averse to this.

Against this it was argued that there was a strong element of rhetoric in the Franco-German relationship; that the French hinterland was of such great strategic importance to Germany that the latter needed constant reassurance about the role which France would play in a conflict; that the UK

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was obtaining a healthy share of European defence procurement and not being squeezed out; and that, rather than try to divide and rule, we should seek areas of constructive collaboration with both France and Germany.

It was agreed that the proposals in paragraphs 11 and 12 of the Foreign Secretary's minute needed further work by officials before consideration by Ministers. Doubts were expressed about a number of the proposals: in particular we should not give the impression of running after the French. The aim should be to ensure that the UK was not frozen out of Franco-German collaboration; to encourage the French back towards a more integrated relationship with the Alliance; and to ensure that the UK received not just credit for but business from collaborative projects. It would be essential to avoid anything, for instance in WEU, which undermined NATO; and to seek collaboration only in areas where we have identifiable interests in common.

CDP

3 October 1984

SEMINAR ON NATO STRATEGY AT CHEQUERS
ON MONDAY, 1 OCTOBER 1984'

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Prime Minister

Rt. Hon. Sir Geoffrey Howe, MP
Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary

Rt. Hon. Michael Heseltine, MP
Secretary of State for Defence

Rt. Hon. John Stanley, MP
Minister of State for the Armed Forces

Sir Robert Armstrong
Secretary of the Cabinet

Sir Clive Whitmore
Permanent Under Secretary,
Ministry of Defence

Field Marshal Sir Edwin Bramall
Chief of Defence Staff

Sir Percy Cradock
Foreign Affairs Adviser to the
Prime Minister

Sir John Graham
UK Representative on the
North Atlantic Council

Mr. A.D.S. Goodall
Deputy Under Secretary,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Mr. Bryan Cartledge
Deputy Secretary, Cabinet Office

Mr. Charles Powell
Private Secretary to the Prime Minister

Professor Lawrence Freedman
Professor War Studies, Kings College
London

Professor Sir Hermann Bondi
Chairman, Natural Environment Research
Council

Sir Arthur Hockaday
Secretary and Director General,
Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Dr. Robert O'Neill
Director, International Institute for
Strategic Studies

Admiral Sir James Eberle
Director, Royal Institute of International
Affairs

Professor Peter Nailor
Professor of History, Chatham House,
Royal Naval College, Greenwich

Sir Clive Rose
Former UK Permanent Representative to
NATO

Professor Laurence Martin
Vice Chancellor, University of Newcastle
upon Tyne

The Lord Cameron of Balhousie
Principal, Kings College, London

Iron Pol Scania

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LB



cc MASTER SET

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

3 October 1984

SEMINAR ON NATO STRATEGY

I enclose a note summarising the discussions on NATO Strategy held at Chequers on 1 October. It covers both the full Seminar and the subsequent session restricted to Ministers and Officials.

I am sending copies of this letter and its enclosure to Len Appleyard (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Philip Francis (Ministry of Defence) and to the official participants in the Seminar.

CHARLES POWELL

Richard Mottram Esq.,
Ministry of Defence.

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VC

Lord Cameron

- U.S.S.R. - Superiority.

- Warning line close.

- Reinforcement for D + 30.
U.S. ? Possible?

Convoy vulnerable.
"Something" should be done

- Chemical Warfare.

- Out of area.

- Soviet - Diversionary Brigades
Ships in ports

Air flot.

- Iron heart - "penetrating this
country"

Sir Arthur

- Trust Defense

Escalation

Nuclear Response.

"still seems valid".

Nuclear Winter,
Weapons - solid deterrent.

67 - deliberate escalation?
limited use - back off.

Sustainability

Sir David Ross

First decision to use
nuclear. Timing of.

U.S. nuclear first?

asked escalation not
automatic?

Russians deterred for
reliability.

Sir Thomas Bondi

Numbers - spurious?

Direction - spurious.

Much less well known than is claimed.

Why the Russians attacking.

"Opportunity to gain"

Answer - show of resolution.

Totally depends - no hope of displacing
American lead technology.

Too much rationality.

Professor Freedman

Don't need nuclear winter to make me
fear nuclear response
Horror of conventional war.

If deterrence fails

Would be in crisis of
stupendous propos.

In crisis - show enough capability.

- something terrible could happen

What would you do if hoops start to
move.

Cohesion - Why war had
started.

What holds alliance together
Plus Plus - reliability or justice.

wouldn't want to dwell on possibility.

"Nuclear crisis" in Congress.

Conventional side

Professor Partin:

"Integrity" "Integrity" of Physics.

Full conventional response - neither
attainable nor desirable.
Wouldn't prevent attacks

If promise you will not go nuclear

Supreme would work on.

Un-used.

Mr O'Neill, - Nuclear Winter - phenomenon
with multiplier

F.R. - Concepts.

Mid 1980's. ^{plausible} - less than in 1970's.

Command & Control facilities.

Soviet doctrines.

- period of change.

FCS

Battlefield nuclear weapons?

∴ stop conventional resources.

Avoid necessity of cohesion
|
because of U.S. determination

Sir James - Nuclear winter - what it might
do to the attacker.

Pressure off

Cohesion vis-à-vis Western public
opinion.

H-K - Wearing own position

Reassurance of own public opinion.

Credible

Fighting a battle

Too much nationality
in foreign int-

Too sophisticated in working out
the public enclaves.

If balloon works.

Criticism

Military shadows will lengthen.

USIA Battle won by third ?

U.S. reduces to nothing

Political battle - Military strategy credit

Hostilities - Political battle

Problems NATO

Military Situation

Existence of Cohesion in former Soviet
are concerned

Alliance — N.A.T.O. — workable

How long can deterrence go on?

Russian Unintentional

Branch

line between Conventional & Nuclear

Strategy — main = deterrence.

- not to use nuclear weapons.

- balancing.

- slight shift from nuclear to conventional.

Fr. - not credible.

- infinite.

- of France budget.
Ueché.

- strategic weapon

- co-ordinated within Alliance

Sir John Gordon

Gen Rogers - doing better than
what we've got.

Conversion capability - independent.

Southern flank

Common - New Technology now.

Security risk

← Technology → A

John

Flexible Response

Response = credible

Credibility		Options
Retrospect		

Political Context

Conventional -

Advanced side

Not all money into advanced technology.

Concept -

Rules of war never change.

Research Side - Political management
Development 40 years ago.

Political shadow over them

Economic shadow.

limited UK

①

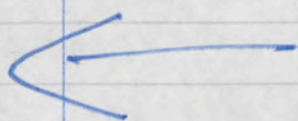
U.K. nuclear force.

②

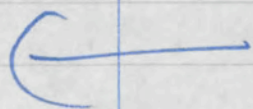
Evolution of
Nuclear.

FIM Small

if not intention to go all
the way.



As much as possible up front.



Greater involvement in

formulation

M-11

Reference - No cheap option.

Handover - Duration - 4 or 5 weeks

CNI) - are Government War-morces

High Value Target

30% Standard Spec

Can't give much ground
— —

Technology - their technology.

|| Cornucopia War - Agriculture already ||
dependent on inputs ||

|| Levels of Trade
of Protection ||

→ Fed Rsv - 30% down

5.9% to 4.7%

Reduce spending on tariffs.

Price disincentives

Out of Southern America.

Buffet Wicker Depos - Wicker - 10%
Wicker Wicker Wicker
Wicker

Lord Curzon

Prof Friedman #

John Stanley ✓
Swiss bank
Unlikely - doubted

but don't know

Prof. Martin

San Juan Board

Battle field Nuclear

Reduce dependence - but



Sir James Blake

Sir John Gorton

Sec of State

F III
Committee
overhead

less dependence

Just capability

Provisional

reserves

Chem - offensive
capability

Civilian

Chemical
why?
Verification
↓

R.O.E

①

Conventions War - $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles

1922 - Row of bunkers

Bayern $4\frac{1}{2}$ hours

Refer to - Powers of Reference

Failure to Refer

②

Chemical Weapons Banned



Capability

③

Just Refer - Just Conclude

- instead of Refer state element

1)

PRG - requests? - No. - Military wants
U.S.S.R.

2)

20-30 years. Can't make it run.

Response to
political
pressure.

3)

Mr. O'Neill

Very interested

Professor Friedman ✓

Professor Naiter ✓

Dr. O'Neill

Sir Isaac Kuhn

Professor Naiter

Sir Isaac

No nuclear
Money

Lord Cameron

John Sturdy ✓

Professor Friedman

Professor Naiter

Professor Bondi ✓

Dr. O'Neill ✓

Sir Alec Bok

Sir Nicholas

If Europe later

French strategy

Fr.

Nuclear Potential

Nuclear weapons