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## 10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

8 October, 1984

### SEMINAR ON NATO STRATEGY

You asked me to set down, rather more fully than was possible in my summary record, Sir Geoffrey Howe's remarks at this seminar.

Distilling a number of illustrious interventions into a single statement, I come up with the following account.

Nice distinctions between various levels of nuclear response were too arcane to influence the public debate on nuclear weapons. The crucial fact was whether there should be a nuclear element to NATO's strategy or not.

In a conflict, the existence of battlefield nuclear weapons could have a key influence. A decision to use them would be a big step, perhaps a crucial one. A high price was being paid in public relations terms for the existence of these weapons. If the experts believed that their military value was in doubt, then perhaps we should be better off without them.

The political cohesion of the Alliance was of first-rate importance. NATO's strength derived in large part from the Soviet Union's perception of its unity and commitment to self-defence. Political divisions in the Alliance could put at risk the US commitment to Europe's defence. It was important, too, to maintain the intellectual coherence of the Alliance vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and to be able to deal in a firm and united way with Soviet proposals that, if allowed to gain ground, would undermine the credibility of NATO's strategy (e.g. a nuclear freeze). A strong commitment to arms control was an essential element in maintaining the support of western public opinion for NATO.

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New technology was unlikely to affect the essentials of NATO's current strategy. Any advance by one side would be matched by the other.

As regards an out-of-area role for NATO, the main weakness lay in the unco-ordinated nature of the activities of countries with an out-of-area capability. There were interesting possibilities for improvement here.

This does not do full justice to his interventions. The seminar was conducted as a debate with opinions expressed in short bursts rather than lengthy statements. But I think it gives the essence.

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