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10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

19 October 1984

IN CONFIDENCE

Dear Sir Arthur,

Thank you for your letter of 2 October. I am glad that you were able to participate in our seminar which my colleagues and I found most stimulating.

Thank you also for your further thoughts on defence priorities. I fully accept your point about the importance of sustainability. Clearly all of us in NATO can and should do more in this area. Indeed, we have already taken steps ourselves to increase stocks and Michael Heseltine has been instrumental in encouraging our European allies to make improvements.

As you say, however, our overriding aim must be to avoid the risk of war breaking out at all. I readily acknowledge that in seeking to achieve this there may be different approaches to the question of what might influence an enemy's perceptions, and so his calculations, most significantly. But, as you know, our judgement - and it is a judgement which has been shared by successive British Governments - is that an independently controlled British strategic nuclear force is an essential element not only of our national deterrent posture but also of the deterrent posture of the NATO Alliance as a whole. I do not,

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moreover, share your implied judgement that financial considerations will force us to choose between Trident and improved sustainability in the conventional field. There is room in the defence programme for both.

May I finally correct one point of fact? The decision to have four Trident boats rather than five was not determined principally by financial considerations. Rather, it was judged that four boats, especially with their improved reactors, would suffice to sustain a minimum deterrent force with the necessary degree of insurance.

Yours sincerely

Raymond Stobart

Sir Arthur Hockaday, KCB, CMG.

IN CONFIDENCE

From SIR ARTHUR HOCKADAY KCB CMG Director-General
(Secretary to the Commission)

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COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION
2 MARLOW ROAD
MAIDENHEAD BERKSHIRE
Telephone: 0628 34221

2 October 1984

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1

Dear Prime Minister

12/10

NATO Strategy

First may I thank you again for inviting me to take part in a very interesting seminar yesterday morning, for your generous hospitality at luncheon, and for the arrangements that were made for some of us to spend the previous night at Thame.

2. Secondly let me repeat that I am quite clear, and you have dispelled any doubts I might have had, that my disagreement with a number of the basic tenets of Just Defence must be reflected in a dissenting note, failing which I cannot associate my name with the project.

3. Thirdly I have been reflecting further upon one point in the discussion, when you took as an assumption the absolute priority of Trident in Britain's defence programme, following which the debate moved on to other things. I should have no hesitation in agreeing with you if expense were no object. But you had made only too clear that expense is an object in the way of the improvements in our conventional posture which all of us agreed to be desirable; and so I wonder whether the absolute primacy of Trident may not warrant reconsideration. Financial considerations have already dictated a decision to have four boats rather than five, thereby markedly exacerbating the problems that would be posed by the loss, for any reason, of one boat during the 20-25 years of the effective life of the force.

4. It would be ingenuous to assume that the Trident force will act as a deterrent to anything other than a nuclear threat against the British Isles. It is very desirable to be able to deter such a threat. Nevertheless, given the financial pressures to which you alluded, may not the first priority be to seek to ensure that matters never reach a pass at which a nuclear threat against the British Isles is on the agenda? This is in a sense the balance of risk against seriousness, of which Sir Hermann Bondi spoke in a different context. The first priority must surely be to deter the first risk, that of war breaking out at all; and most of us felt that while the conventional posture of the Alliance was not hopeless its conventional forces, to which Britain makes a significant contribution (very significant indeed in quality), needed some strengthening.

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IN CONFIDENCE



5. The Defence Secretary suggested that Trident would consume a relatively small proportion of defence resources, though you uttered a timely warning about exchange rates. I know, too, that the question has sometimes been asked whether deterrence would be more greatly enhanced by Trident or by additional armoured formations. But I do not believe that the first priority for conventional improvement is more men or greater numbers of major weapon systems. I believe that the first priority is sustainability, upon which yesterday's discussion touched from time to time. You said quite rightly that the Falklands War had reminded us that wars usually last longer than people expect. It also rubbed in the lesson of the recent Middle East wars, that ammunition and other consumable stores are expended in greater quantities and much more rapidly than people expect; I believe there were one or two quite close calls on the logistic side, in part of course reflecting the fact that the relatively limited scale of the conflict was offset by the problems posed by distance. Ten billion pounds (or more) may seem relatively little in relation to the costs of manpower or major weapon systems, but it is very substantial in the scale of logistic expenditure and could, I believe, make a very significant difference to the sustainability, hence to the confidence, and hence to the credibility of our conventional forces.

6. This is why I wonder whether there might be a case for a further study of the absolute priority of Trident before too much money is irretrievably committed.

Yours sincerely

Arthur Rockdale

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17th October 1984

Dear Mr. Esq.

Your letter of 3rd October asked for a draft reply to Sir Arthur Hockaday's letter of 2nd October, following the Chequers Seminar. A draft is now attached for the Prime Minister's consideration; it has been approved by the Defence Secretary.

Yours etc,

Richard Mottram

(R C MOTTRAM)

C Powell Esq

DRAFT

Please type for
PM's signature
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NATO STRATEGY

Thank you for your letter of 2nd October. I am glad that you were able to participate in our seminar which my colleagues and I found most stimulating.

Thank you also for your further thoughts on defence priorities. I fully accept your point about the importance of sustainability. Clearly all of us in NATO can and should do more in this area. Indeed, we have already taken steps ourselves to increase stocks and Michael Heseltine has been instrumental in encouraging our European allies to make improvements.

As you say, however, our overriding aim must be to avoid ~~the~~ risk of war breaking out at all. I readily acknowledge that in seeking to achieve this there may be different approaches to the question of what might influence an enemy's perceptions, and so his calculations, most significantly. But, as you know, our judgement - and it is a judgement which has been shared by successive British Government - is that an independently controlled British strategic nuclear force is an essential element not only of our national deterrent posture but also of the deterrent posture of the NATO Alliance as a whole. I do not, moreover, share your implied judgement that financial considerations will force us to choose between Trident and improved sustainability in the conventional field. There is room in the defence programme for both.

May I finally correct one point of fact? The decision to have four Trident boats rather than five was not determined principally by financial considerations. Rather, it was judged that four boats, especially with their improved reactors, would suffice to sustain a minimum deterrent force with the necessary degree of insurance.

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File 88

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

3 October 1984

NATO Strategy

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I enclose a copy of a letter to the Prime Minister from Arthur Hockaday, following up certain points made at the Chequers seminar last Monday. I should be grateful for a draft reply.

Charles Powell

Richard Mottram Esq
Ministry of Defence

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