



PM/81/30

PRIME MINISTERPolitical Co-operation

1. I do not believe that there is any cause for the disquiet expressed by the Defence Secretary in his minute to you of 28 May. The meeting at Venlo on 9/10 May was informal, so there is no record of its conclusions. But I can certainly reassure John Nott on what I understand to be his two chief points.

2. First, nobody has suggested that the European Community as an organisation should have anything to do with either security or defence. We are talking about Political Cooperation between the ten member states, which is not part of the Community apparatus. The question raised at Venlo was whether there is not an area of international affairs, loosely designated "security policy", which the Ten have not discussed together in the past, but should discuss in future. I think myself that there is and I said so at Venlo.

3. The term "security policy" is more familiar in continental languages than in English, but it is understood to include for example the potential threat to Western interests in such areas as the Gulf and Africa. It stops well short of anything that could be described as "defence", and the presence of the Irish will ensure that the distinction is maintained.

4. Second, there is the proposal to strengthen the Presidency. This goes back a long way and has nothing to do with the other point about security policy. The question is simply whether, in seeking the common European voice which the Defence Secretary also advocates, it is safe to rely at all times and for all purposes on the national

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Prime Minister
The proof of this pudding will be in the eating.

Andy / I share
J.N.'s misgivings
not.



apparatus of whichever state happens to be the holder of the Presidency. The Afghan experience convinced me that it is not. Hence my proposal for a small support staff, and in my minute to you of 6 May I spoke of a three to five-man team. There is no question of setting up a new international staff, nor of bringing in the armies of functionaries that John Nott complains of and of which I have had some experience myself at NATO Ministerial meetings. The suggested team would consist of people seconded from their own Foreign Ministries and therefore costing, like the rest of the Political Co-operation system, almost nothing. I do not yet know whether this idea is going to bear fruit - there have been much more sweeping proposals from some quarters - but I regard it as reasonable and indeed long overdue.

5. I am sending copies of this minute to other members of OD and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

(CARRINGTON)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

4 June 1981

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B11 with F.C.G. reply
in due course.

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Prime Minister

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PRIME MINISTER

Lord Carrington is well aware that you share many of the views set out below.

On one point the Note is rather disingenuous: there is really no comparison between the Eurogroup & the suggestions that Foreign Ministers should have a small staff to provide continuity or that they should discuss e.g.

POLITICAL CO-OPERATION "confidence building measures"

29/5

I am sorry to be commenting so late on the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's minute to you of 6th May, and I appreciate that he was seeking guidance for a meeting of Foreign Ministers which has now taken place. I hope that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will keep the Ministry of Defence closely informed of possible discussions by Foreign Ministers which touch on matters of "Security Policy" including arms control issues, where I can, and have, exerted some minor influence on Pentagon opinion. Although it is now rather late to influence the Government's declared position I must record my disquiet about the proposal that the EC, as an organisation, should become more closely involved than hitherto in discussions of questions of "Security Policy". I do not seek to make essentially a "Defence Minister point". My concern ranges wider than that. It is that a further bureaucratisation of the procedures for consultation, and their bureaucratisation within a framework not designed for this purpose, can only lead first to a proliferation of unnecessary work, and, secondly, to further the constraints within which we are already forced to work.

2. I was struck, by what admittedly was my first experience of Eurogroup (the European group of Defence Ministers) in Brussels recently, how tedious and time wasting these committee structures can be. And once they are created - however good the initial motives (as no doubt they were in the case of Eurogroup) inevitably they grow and harden. I hope that if it is essential to pursue the Venlo initiative we can be mindful of this point.

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I agree with J.N. - all the way

I agree with J.N.



3. I note what Peter Carrington says about a "support staff" for the Presidency: I understand the reasons for this proposal, and I appreciate that Peter says the staff must be kept small, but the objections to which I have referred still apply. At NATO meetings I am astonished at the sheer number of senior officials and high-ranking Service officers, with their associated staffs. Every new group creates a further increase in staff requirements and associated committees.

4. To make a wider point again, there is a world of difference between playing a positive role in Europe and seeking, where appropriate a common "European voice" (which I entirely support), and indulging - or submerging - ourselves in the development of "communautaire" ideology. And there is, of course, also a Defence point, which is that we must continue to keep our discussions on defence with our principal Allies in NATO and not allow any muddying of the issues by extending this to other fora. All the major members of the EC are in NATO and insofar - and I do not think that it is very far - as we need to discuss defence matters with other members of the Community, that can be done, and is done, separately. I fail to see why it should be necessary to create another community organisation, however small, when Eurogroup already exists and burdens us with a mass of committees, most of which are more appropriate to meeting "Parkinson's Law" than to defending Europe.

5. I am sending copies of this minute to Peter Carrington and the other members of OD: and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Ministry of Defence
28th May 1981

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

8 June 1981

Political Co-operation

The Prime Minister has seen the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's minute to her of 4 June as well as the Defence Secretary's minute to her of 28 May on this subject. As you know, the Prime Minister shares Mr. Nott's misgivings.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to other members of OD and to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

M. O'D. B. ALEXANDER

Brian Fall, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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