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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

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Prime Minister 26 March 1990

Dear Charles,

Some MOD comments,
but nothing very new
COP 20th May

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS OF CURRENT TRENDS IN THE ALLIANCE AND EAST-WEST RELATIONS

1. The Defence Secretary saw your letter of 5 March to Stephen Wall. MOD officials were closely involved in the preparation of the Foreign Office papers of 2nd March and they provide in his view an excellent basis for a discussion. Since this has been delayed it might, however, be helpful if the Defence Secretary comments now.

2. The FCO paper on "Strategic Implications" points to the need for a revised military strategy within the framework of flexible response and forward defence. We shall need to guard against pressure from allies for a new strategy in order to discard those elements of flexible response with which they are uncomfortable, while at the same time ourselves pursuing the case for significant change in the way in which strategy is implemented. Work is in hand here on:

- future threats/risks of war;
- future military concepts;
- and force structures.

3. A fourth major study of the military implications of extending NATO to cover a united Germany will be completed shortly. Some of the provisional conclusions, within the framework set out in the FCO paper, are likely to be:

a. for theatre nuclear forces, with CFE and developments in Eastern Europe, the emphasis will be increasingly on systems of longer range. While there is a case for a spread of systems, it is clear that the US Administration - including the Department of Defence - are close to giving up on FOTL. We should then increasingly have to rely on a single delivery system - dual-capable aircraft - and bombs and tactical air-to-surface missiles (TASM). At the recent meeting of senior Nuclear Planning Group officials there was broad support for TASM, (including from the Germans). The problem will be to sustain this over a deployment period still years



ahead. It may be worth offering a pre-emptive reduction in warhead numbers to secure continued acceptance of basing delivery systems in Germany.

b. Forward defence in the Central Region is increasingly likely to mean a capability to deploy forward, rather than the presence of large forces on the NATO border. There remains a need for a credible level of readily-available forces in Germany; and it is important that these forces reflect the collective commitment of the Alliance, and thus comprise units from several countries.

c. In planning for the deployment forward of Allied ground forces in Germany, there are arguments for deploying far forward only those forces that are strictly necessary to demonstrate commitment (on the model of the present ACE Mobile Force (Land)) and those which can provide a covering force or screen (which will depend upon what German forces are deployed in former GDR territory). Main defensive forces should be deployed forward only as far as is militarily desirable and feasible in terms of affordable logistics and warning time. There would be many advantages in seeking to establish main defences further to the east than the present defensive line; but the further east the main defensive position goes, the greater become the problems of deployment, air cover, intelligence support, logistics and an exposed Baltic flank. There could be awkward trade-offs here for the Germans - and the Alliance more generally - between the pressure for limits on peacetime deployments in the GDR, and the need for a coherent defence in the event of war.

d. It would be important to evolve a sensible concept for integrating the air defence of East German territory with that of the West; and to be able to exercise, if only on a limited scale, plans both for reinforcement and forward deployment, even if this tests German (and initially Soviet) tolerance.

e. Present logistic systems would have to be restructured to make combat formations more self-sufficient; extra fuel, repair and spares requirements would be inherent in longer deployment distances; and longer lines of communication require investment to deal with the additional vulnerability created.

4. The political and diplomatic difficulties inherent in some of these military conclusions point up the central dilemma facing us. If NATO is to be able to defend the former GDR territory (without basing forces there), many practical military problems will have to be addressed and solved. Otherwise we shall commit the classic mistake of offering security guarantees while failing to deploy the



military capability to back it up (for fear of offending the potential adversary). This may be seen as a practical compromise at the time the guarantee is given, but might encourage aggression later from potential adversaries (because deterrence is flawed) and pose substantial military difficulties in recovering the territory if an attack occurs. Thus, if we are to accept the extension of Articles V and VI of the NATO Treaty to the former GDR territory, we must ensure that adequate security structures are agreed.

5. The MOD is also looking in depth at the case for increasing multinationality in force structures. Mixed nationality forces are already much in evidence in the structure of NATO air forces; and in ground forces at Army Group level and above. There is not therefore an issue of principle involved here: rather we need to address practical issues of military cost-effectiveness. The extension of the multinational approach to lower levels of command in the case of ground forces has clear politico-military attractions. But we need to bear in mind that:

- there is a trade-off between military efficiency and multinationality. There are levels of command where language, logistic and equipment complications render the exercise ineffective. For different types of formation and role, this level could vary: one universal solution is unlikely to be the answer.
- Multinationalism could be expensive, and requires a good degree of interoperability. The lower the level, the more required; in Brigades for example, it would not work without much commonality.
- Part of the thrust to more "Multinational" forces is to remove the "occupation" association of stationed forces. It remains to be seen whether the Americans will be willing to change their own formations. In any case, changes in command structures may not be sufficient: we need also to look at other changes involving, for example, the stationing of German forces in other Allied countries, and changes to symbols (badges, flags, garrison and air base names) to have an impact on public opinion.

6. In addressing both increasing the "multinational" approach to NATO forces and future Alliance defence more widely, we need to consider both the desired end-point and the transition period, when CFE reductions will still be in train and Soviet forces may remain in East Germany.



7. The Defence Secretary sees a continuing difficulty over tactical handling. With Allies, it is important to discourage a pre-emptive run-down of forces that might leave European security excessively weakened if the Soviet leadership changed. But in taking that wider stance we should not allow ourselves to lose opportunities to get a fair share of any reductions that can safely be made.

8. A particularly difficult issue will be the position of our facilities in Berlin including the garrison. We assess that the UK garrison could be withdrawn in good order in a period of about 12 months, if this were judged necessary. While it can be argued that Allied forces should remain in Berlin for a period after unification, the value of the garrison in military defence is questionable, and there could be considerable cost to the defence budget if (as seems probable) German subsidies were withdrawn. Account will also need to be taken of decisions on the future of our intelligence facilities in Berlin. The Defence Secretary believes that the future of our forces in Berlin should be addressed in the work underway on "options for change" and announced in that wider context.

9. I am copying this letter to Stephen Wall (FCO), John Gieve (HM Treasury) and Sonia Phippard (Cabinet Office).

*Yours sincerely,
Swn Webb.*

(S WEBB)
Private Secretary