



PM/79/62

PRIME MINISTERTheatre Nuclear Arms Control

1. When we discuss the Defence Secretary's ^{5/7} paper on our possible contribution to NATO's theatre nuclear force (TNF) modernisation programme, I think that we should also take stock of the Alliance's parallel work on theatre nuclear arms control.
2. The need for an arms control approach to accompany NATO's TNF modernisation programme arises from a number of political pressures. First, some of our Allies (notably the Dutch, Danes and Norwegians) have made it clear that such an approach is essential if they are to be associated with decisions on TNF modernisation. Second, the Soviet Union is pressing to negotiate on Western theatre nuclear systems in SALT III, and the Alliance needs to work out its response to this. Third, Cruise missiles, by virtue of their inclusion in the SALT II Protocol, are already on the SALT III agenda. Finally, concern about the threat posed by the Soviet SS20 makes it desirable to restrict this particular system. However the case for theatre nuclear arms control is primarily political and negotiations may offer only limited military benefits.
3. The issues are being studied in the Alliance by a Special Group. Its initial view is that any negotiation on theatre systems should take place within SALT III and should concentrate on modern Soviet long-range missiles, preferably with a separate limit on the Backfire bomber. The Americans will in any case make clear to the Russians shortly that any SALT III limitations on US theatre systems should be matched by comparable limitations on the Soviet side.
4. The Special Group's report will be ready in time to be considered by NATO Ministers with the report of the High Level Group on TNF modernisation before the end of the year. Most of the Allies, including the US and FRG, want an early decision to go ahead with TNF modernisation, coupled with a general offer to discuss theatre systems in SALT III. The Dutch, Danes and Norwegians, however, favour a more detailed proposal for early arms control negotiations, pending which TNF modernisation might be held in suspense. As a



compromise, the Germans have suggested a 3-phase approach involving:

- (a) a start on the implementation of TNF modernisation decisions;
- (b) arms control negotiations within SALT III; and
- (c) a review of the final size of the TNF programme in the light of any concrete arms control results.

This may provide a basis for carrying the Scandinavians and Dutch with us while demonstrating to the Russians that the Alliance is definitely going ahead with a TNF programme.

5. It is agreed that, since European interests will be intimately involved in SALT III, there must be closer consultation than during SALT II. The important thing will be to ensure that we can influence US policy. This will best be achieved by preserving our close bilateral contacts with the Americans through Washington and the Alliance; and by seeking the maximum of common ground between ourselves and the Germans.

6. A particular problem of direct national concern, on which we are likely to need to decide before the end of this year, is whether British nuclear systems should be included in SALT III and whether the UK should participate in the negotiations. The Americans have so far been scrupulous in assuming that British and French systems should be excluded; and the French have made clear that they have no intention of participating. But the Russians are demanding that other nuclear powers beside the US should be involved in SALT III. This could be an important issue during the period of sparring before the shape of SALT III is finally agreed.

7. We cannot accept that British nuclear systems should be the subject of detailed discussion, and therefore liable to limitation, at a negotiation at which we are not present. But in the last resort we cannot prevent the Americans and Russians from taking our systems (and those of the French) indirectly into account in a bilateral SALT III. It is however too soon to judge how persistent Soviet pressure to secure the inclusion of British nuclear systems will be. Another question is whether all our long-range nuclear forces, including the Polaris force, might be involved rather than just our



Vulcan bombers and any successors they may have. In any case if there were to be any question of our systems being counted against overall Western totals, we would need to establish in advance with the Americans the precise conditions.

8. Against this background we need to consider the general lines on which we want both our own and Alliance policy to evolve during the coming months. I suggest that these should be:

- (a) We should support efforts to develop an arms control position which allows TNF modernisation to go ahead from December, while meeting the domestic concerns of our Allies;
- (b) We should avoid any constraints which would undermine the effectiveness of our nuclear forces. There is, however, no need yet for decisions about UK participation, or the inclusion of British nuclear forces, in SALT III;
- (c) We should revert to the question of the British role in SALT III in the light of further studies of the arguments for and against involvement. For the time being, we should go along with planning assumption in NATO that British systems will be excluded.

9. I am copying this minute to the Defence Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Home Secretary and Sir John Hunt.

(CARRINGTON)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
6 July 1979