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15 December 1976

PLANNING PAPER ON DÉTENTE AND THE FUTURE MANAGEMENT
OF EAST/WEST RELATIONS

1. The attached Planning Paper was commissioned by the PUS earlier this year. Its purpose was to put into focus a subject which, after Angola, had been provoking more emotion than clarity of thought, and to provide a coherent analysis of where British interests lie in the détente process. The paper sets out to review dispassionately the various stands and concerns which make détente of interest to both East and West, but which at the same time impose limits on what can be achieved.
2. After approval by the PUS's Steering Committee, the paper was submitted to FCO Ministers and formed the basis of a recent office meeting on détente chaired by the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State expressed general approval of the paper, and intends to draw on it when he refers in speeches to East/West relations.
3. The paper is now being circulated to all FCO departments and to all posts overseas. As the final paragraph explains it does not call for new initiatives by the UK, but provides a frame of reference and a basis for UK contributions to intra-Western discussions. It should be drawn on (with due discretion) by all posts which have occasion to discuss this subject with their contacts.

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DÉTENTE AND THE FUTURE MANAGEMENT OF EAST/WEST RELATIONS

S U M M A R Y

INTRODUCTION

1. The word "détente" has been much overworked and misused, but the gradual evolution of East/West relations away from the cold war and confrontation cannot conveniently be described by any other term. The paper attempts to define how the evolution of détente would best accord with Western interests.

(para 1)

I: THE NATURE OF DÉTENTE

2. After the breakdown of earlier attempts to move away from sterile confrontation, both sides in the later 1960s attached increasing importance to the creation of a more stable relationship. This led to the negotiation in the 1970s of a modest modus vivendi based upon a common interest in the avoidance of military confrontation leading to nuclear war.

(paras 2-3)

3. Below this level, different countries have different interests and objectives. The Soviet Union sees the process of détente both as meeting state interests and as facilitating the promotion through the ideological struggle of the world-wide triumph of communism. The Soviet Union seeks to avoid a renewed nuclear arms spiral, to secure access to Western technology, capital and grain, to isolate China, to retain elbow-room for the political and ideological struggle and to preserve and perhaps extend its authority on the European continent. The United States seeks to manage the emergence of the Soviet Union as a superpower and to create a vested interest in cooperation; and eventually perhaps even to achieve a breaking down of East/West barriers. Western Europe shares United States interests, but attaches greater importance to East/West trade. Of the European Community countries, the FRG has special concerns arising from the division of Germany. France has sought to assert an independent personality, while the UK has aimed to play a responsible role in the formulation of overall Western policy towards the East. The Eastern European states seek opportunities for advantageous dealings with Western countries, access to Western markets and technology and opportunities for some assertion of national personality.

(paras 4-9)

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4. Recent changes in East/West relations have been changes of degree, not of kind. The nature of the Soviet and Eastern European regimes has not changed. This, together with the continuing Soviet military build-up, has led to some disillusionment in the West. However, the West has not given away valuable cards, and there have been real if limited gains. Disappointment has resulted from exaggerated and unwarranted expectations.

(paras 10-12)

II: THE CURRENT BUSINESS OF DÉTENTE

5. East/West negotiations combine a cooperative approach to solving difficult problems and a confrontational approach aimed at achieving advantage. SALT lies at the heart of the détente process and the interests of both sides make it reasonable to hope for a SALT II Agreement in 1977. The CSCE embodies and exemplifies both the search for common ground and the unresolved struggle. Basket III is very important for Western public opinion, but the Russians cannot fail to see it as an exercise in confrontation. MBFR rests in part on common interests, but the Western hope of reducing the Warsaw Pact's existing advantage is bound to seem confrontational to the Soviet Union. Reconciliation of the conflicting approaches will be difficult. There are common interests in some other areas of arms control (eg the Test Ban Treaty, the NPT), but the prospects for genuine disarmament are remote.

(paras 13-19)

6. The motives behind the Soviet proposals for all European conferences on energy, transport and the environment are not entirely clear, but the West is right to be prudently unenthusiastic, and should continue to emphasise the rôle of the ECE.

(para 20)

7. The growth of East/West trade has been an important factor in the development of East/West relations, and has led to suggestions that the economy of the Soviet Union is no longer autarkic. Because of the sizeable balance of payments deficits run up by some of the East European countries, it has also led to a greatly increased level of indebtedness to the West. For the West this trade remains no more than marginal; for the Soviet Union it is sufficiently significant to be a factor in foreign policy decisions. On the other hand, the competitive aspects of Soviet foreign economic policy (eg in shipping and fisheries) could provoke political problems. Problems have arisen from the refusal of the Soviet Union and its allies to deal directly with the Community. It would be against Western interests to allow the Soviet Union to use this as a pretext for strengthening the CMEA.

(paras 21-25)

III: DEVELOPMENTS WHICH MIGHT AFFECT DÉTENTE

8. The next generation of Soviet leaders are an unknown factor but they are unlikely to have a changed view of essential Soviet interests. On the American side, Mr Carter is more likely to change style than substance. The new Chinese leadership may see advantage in a degree of normalisation of Sino/Soviet relations, but this is unlikely to have any major effect on East/West relations over the next few years.

(paras 26-29)

9. If the West does not maintain defence expenditure, the discrepancy in resource allocation between the two sides could undermine the credibility of NATO's strategy; and defence cuts by other NATO members could make the Alliance increasingly a bilateral US/German affair. Developments in military technology, assuming that they are introduced by both sides, are not likely to confer any significant advantage on either.

(paras 30-31)

10. The superpowers could be drawn into regional crises, most obviously in the Middle East, but perhaps most awkwardly in Korea. Communist participation in an Italian or French government would weaken the North Atlantic Alliance, but would also pose problems for the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe and in East/West relations.

(paras 32-36)

11. The Soviet Union will continue to find openings to exploit in some Third World countries, but its dismal aid performance and its economic irrelevance in the dialogue between developed and developing countries may hamper the extension of its influence.

(paras 37-38)

12. The status quo in Eastern Europe is inherently unstable, but there are limits to the scope for change. There is a risk of East/West confrontation over Yugoslavia after Tito's death. Even the Soviet Union itself is not immune from pressures for change and this is the only way in which the confrontational element in East/West relations might eventually be diminished; but the process of change could equally lead to greater confrontation.

(paras 39-42)

IV: POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS FOR WESTERN POLICY MAKERS

13. The fundamental requirement is the avoidance or successful management of crises. From the Western point of view

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this calls for the early identification of situations which might tempt the Russians and for postures which leave as little room as possible for Soviet miscalculation of the limits of Western tolerance. If the Soviet Union does not exercise restraint, the West can choose between a sharply destabilising and potentially dangerous reaction - eg calling off SALT; a partially destabilising and probably ineffectual reaction designed to punish the Soviet Union - eg restrictions on trade; or threatening to react if the Soviet Union does not pull back - ie diplomatic deterrence of the sort adopted by the US in the case of Angola. The problem reduces in the end to early identification of situations which might tempt the Russians and the devising of sets of signals which would make it clear to them that Soviet misbehaviour would have serious consequences. Bilateral contacts can make a useful contribution in this area.

(paras 43-53)

14. Threats to cut off existing trade are less likely to influence Soviet behaviour than steps to encourage the belief that Soviet restraint would facilitate increased trade of the sort which the Soviet Union wants. Western countries need better coordination of their credit policies. The European Community could develop more common policies towards the Soviet Union.

(paras 54-59)

15. Détente cannot be stable if it is not carried into the armaments field and there is a strong case for making MEFR the proving ground for détente.

(paras 60-64)

16. The development of bilateral relations at many levels will continue to be a major element in the détente process. Western countries should continue to expand bilateral links and contacts, perhaps differentiating between individual Eastern European countries.

(para 65)

17. Despite the limited prospects of success, the West should continue to promote the freer movement of people and ideas through steady pressure for the implementation of Basket III and otherwise. Broadcasting to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe is particularly important. The main target will always be the Soviet Union, but it could be influenced via developments in Eastern Europe.

(paras 66-68)

V: WESTERN COORDINATION

18. The West can achieve its objectives in East/West relations only by maintaining its cohesion and firmness of purpose. Of the points examined in Section IV, crisis management is an area in which the lead has to be taken by the US. Careful pursuit of consultation within NATO is important. The need for greater Western coordination in economic policies is already recognised, and work is in progress both in the OECD and in the Community. The degree of importance to be attached to MBFR, and the tactical handling of the promotion of freer movement of people and ideas, are already matters of continuing discussion between Western countries. In general none of the ideas discussed in Section IV calls for new UK initiatives; but they could contribute to the UK input to intra-NATO and intra-Community discussions which are already in train.

(paras 69-76)