

DEFENCEForeign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH



From the Secretary of State

8 November 1982

Dear John,

I have now seen the Private and Confidential papers on the presentation of defence nuclear policy culminating in John Nott's letter of 20 October to you. I gather that there are further meetings early next week.

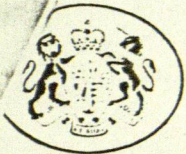
Obviously, this is a subject of enormous importance for the conduct of our foreign policy as well as a major political issue here at home.

I would like to make three main points:

- (i) this is not a problem in Britain alone. It faces almost all our major allies in NATO. It crops up almost every week in inter-allied discussion. If we are to succeed at home we need to work closely with like-minded Governments. A rash remark by a senior American, or a weak decision by the Dutch (to take just two possible examples) could be a big setback to our efforts here. In our experience, for example at the recent NATO colloquium in Sunningdale, other countries are behind us in organising their effort and increasingly interested in what we are doing;

/(ii)

The Rt Hon John Biffen MP



- (ii) We must have a hopeful story alongside the sombre one. Otherwise we shall not make sense to many anxious people. In my judgement, people will only be persuaded that it is right to maintain our nuclear deterrent if they believe that we are also doing our best in the long term to check and then remove the nuclear arms race. This is the political importance of arms control and disarmament, for which, of course the Foreign Office is responsible. It is hard, dry, technical stuff, very difficult to put across to a wide public. There are an increasing number of groups, some hostile, some friendly, who are passionately interested and with whom we keep in close touch and for whom we produce literature which is, I think, forceful but reasoned. We cannot promise quick results. We must be able to promise genuine effort on our part, or else there will be a crucial gap in our total argument. It is essential to follow, and be seen to follow, the double track laid down by NATO in 1979;
- (iii) You suggested in your letter of 20 October to John Nott that we should to some extent switch our argument away from the Soviet threat and deal with the risk of other powers, say Pakistan or Libya, acquiring nuclear weapons. This needs very careful handling. One of our main anxieties in the years ahead must be that irresponsible powers will develop nuclear weapons. We have been very lucky in recent years that they have not done so. There are signs that this lull may be coming to an end. Non-nuclear powers going nuclear would use your argument that it is 'a natural right of all nations ... to maintain such forces, conventional or otherwise, as are necessary to defend legitimate national interests'. It is very much in our interests to dissuade them from taking this line and to show that it is right for the world as a whole that the number of nuclear powers should not increase. It would be naive to suppose that these countries will take their decisions on the basis of

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words spoken in Britain, but we should not give them ammunition to defend a decision which would be very much against our interest.

In addition, civil defence is a strand in our argument. Our opponents regard it as one of the weakest strands. At the many public meetings on the subject which Ministers and MPs address, they meet fierce questioning on civil defence, as if it were a bull point for CND. It seems essential that the Home Office should be closely involved in what we plan.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Prime Minister, John Nott, Norman Tebbit and Cecil Parkinson.

*Mr. Nott*

*Mr. Tebbit*