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10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

17 July 1981

My dear Mr. Gorbachev,

Thank you so much for your letter of 30 June setting out your imaginative proposal for voluntary disarmament in Western Europe.

Like you, I long for a world in which Western Europe would not need armaments to defend itself; the countries of Eastern Europe would be freed from Soviet domination; there would be no military threat to Western Europe from the Soviet Union; and all political prisoners in the Soviet Union would be released. That is the kind of ideal objective which the members of the European Community have had in mind in the context of the work for co-operation and security in Europe. But the results so far, as you will know, have been disappointing.

The reasons are not hard to seek. The Soviet Union sees itself in fundamental conflict with the West. It claims to believe that the spread of Communism is essential for world peace and progress. It tries to increase its political influence by all means short of war. Although in our view Western Europe poses no conceivable military threat to the Soviet Union, the latter continues to arm at a level far exceeding any defensive requirements. Although its economy is weak and it cannot even feed its people, it enjoys super-power status by virtue of its military might.

No one can be altogether certain about the intentions of the Soviet Union. But we can observe and judge its behaviour. The invasion of Afghanistan, an independent non-aligned state, was rightly condemned by 111 countries at the United Nations. We should

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We should like to see a political solution. You will be aware of the proposals by the European Community which Peter Carrington took to Moscow earlier this month, and of the Soviet reaction. We shall keep on trying because a Soviet withdrawal would, among other things, improve the political climate for arms control negotiations. So, of course, would lifting the relentless pressure on Poland.

The Western states have frequently tried a policy of self-denial in armaments. In 1946 the United States voluntarily offered to give up its monopoly possession of nuclear weapons in a bid to abolish them completely. The US, Britain and France have reduced their force levels well below the figures discussed in 1956. Since 1968, when the super-powers agreed to start negotiations on limiting strategic arms, NATO has deliberately refrained from deploying new theatre nuclear forces in Europe. During the 1970s, NATO countries reduced their military spending in real terms, while trying to negotiate a series of arms control agreements with the Soviet Union. In no case (and there are several other instances) did the Soviet Union reciprocate; in fact, it continued to expand its military power on a very large scale.

I am forced to the conclusion that there would have to be a far deeper level of international trust and confidence between East and West before the sort of agreement you envisage would become negotiable. We are doing all we can to bring this about. For example, we have supported the French proposal at Madrid for a Conference on Disarmament in Europe to negotiate militarily significant, politically binding and verifiable confidence-building measures applicable to the whole Continent of Europe, including the European part of the Soviet Union. We have given our strong support to the new US Administration in its decision to pursue talks with the Soviet Union this year on the limitation of long-range theatre nuclear forces, such as the SS20 and Cruise missiles. We are working for mutual and balanced force reductions by both NATO and the Warsaw Pact in Central Europe.

/The question

The question of disarmament is frequently discussed in the European Community under the heading of political co-operation. I believe that if we remain united in our search for balanced and verifiable arms control agreements we will eventually convince the Soviet Union that the only way to achieve true detente is to follow the path of peace in all their activities.

Wonderful to hear from you again.
I do so agree with you about economics.
If we live our lives aright, economics will
come right - if we don't, then economics go
wrong too. Everything comes back to human
beings and their values.

All good wishes,

Yours sincerely

Margaret Thatcher

Mr Yehudi Menuhin, KBE