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cc FCO

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PRIME MINISTER'S  
PERSONAL MESSAGE  
SERIAL No. T157A/79T

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

3 December 1979

Your Excellency

Thank you for the letter which your Ambassador delivered on 15 October, summarising the ideas set out in your speech on 6 October in East Berlin.

The British Government have welcomed the announcement that you intend to withdraw troops, tanks and other equipment from the German Democratic Republic; we take this as an encouraging sign that you too are concerned to make progress in the negotiations in Vienna and that it will be possible to reach agreements there leading to equal collective ceilings for NATO and Warsaw Pact forces in Central Europe. We have also noted with interest your ideas for expanding the scope of confidence building measures. We shall take these ideas seriously into account when preparing for the Madrid CSCE Review Conference, at which we and our Allies will have proposals of our own to make. We have welcomed in particular the indication that the Soviet Government would be willing to discuss the possibility of limiting long range nuclear weapons relevant to the European theatre. This is very much in line with thinking in NATO, where this subject has been under intense discussion for many months.

While I note what you say about the numbers of medium range bombers and missile launchers in the European part of the Soviet Union, I cannot overlook the fact that the overall capability of Soviet nuclear systems within range of Western Europe has greatly increased during this decade. At a time when NATO has not introduced any new land-based long range theatre nuclear systems, the latest Soviet systems have been deployed in substantial numbers. As a result the Soviet Union's capability in this area has significantly improved in terms of warhead numbers, accuracy

/and survivability.

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and survivability. This development has created an imbalance between the Soviet and Western forces, which has given rise to widespread anxiety in Western Europe. It is to prevent this imbalance from becoming more serious in the next decade that NATO is considering plans to modernise its long range theatre forces and to make full use of the opportunities for arms control. We attach equal importance to both parts of this programme.

In a speech which I delivered in Luxembourg on 18 October, I explained that the restoration of a military balance in Europe was not an end in itself but that it was the necessary condition for the development of relations between East and West. I argued for a realistic dialogue designed to build on our interests where they coincide and to limit the consequences where they conflict. It is in this spirit that I have studied your letter. The British Government look forward, in the coming months, to building on several of the ideas which you have put forward.

I also note your assurance that the Soviet Union does not seek military superiority. But I hope that you for your part will understand the real concern in Western Europe that, while the central strategic balance is being stabilised through SALT, there is a growing disparity in long range theatre nuclear capabilities, which adds to the existing imbalance in conventional forces in Central Europe. This imbalance cannot be ignored in the realistic pursuit of better East/West relations to which the British Government is committed.

Yours sincerely

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His Excellency Mr. Leonid Ilich Brezhnev