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PRIME MINISTER'S
PERSONAL MESSAGE
SERIAL No. T.59/81

Thank you for your letter of 6 March. As I said in response to a question about it in Parliament, it is important that there should be effective consultation between East and West. I see your message as a useful contribution to this process. I have also read with interest Sir Curtis Keeble's account of his recent conversation with Mr. Gromyko. I hope that there will be occasion for further such conversations. You will find the British side ready to play its full part in a business-like and constructive dialogue on questions of mutual interest.

I welcome your assurance that the Soviet Union is not seeking military superiority. As you know, there are differences between us as to whether an overall balance of forces now exists. But the objective of striking an even balance and of seeking to do so at a lower level is one which the British Government support and will strive to achieve. I hope that we shall be able to work together to this end. The overriding priority of all governments must be the preservation of peace. This can only be assured if international relations are conducted with the restraint necessary to the creation of a climate of confidence and trust. In the absence of such a climate, efforts to promote arms control agreements and to cut military spending, both of which are of the greatest importance, will not prosper.

There is a pressing need for a solution to the problem of Afghanistan in accordance with the resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly. I note with interest the reference in your letter to the need to protect fully the sovereignty and the non-aligned status of Afghanistan. This approach contains elements which are to be found in earlier proposals for resolving the problem. The aim should be to build on these proposals and to construct a political settlement which provides for the withdrawal of Soviet troops and the freedom of the Afghan people to have a government of their own choosing.

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Such a settlement would need, of course, to take into account the legitimate interests of Afghanistan's neighbours, including those of the Soviet Union. Dr. Waldheim's appointment of Senor de Cuellar could be helpful in this connection and I hope that the Soviet Union will be willing to receive him. Whether achieved in these or other ways, there is no doubt that progress on Afghanistan would be of immediate benefit to East/West relations. I note your statement of willingness to take part in a settlement of the situation.

I also welcome your acceptance of the principle that Confidence Building Measures should cover the whole of the continent of Europe, including the European part of the USSR. If the question of territorial application is thus satisfactorily resolved, I hope that we can all move quickly to endorse the other criteria put forward in the French proposal at Madrid for a Conference on Disarmament in Europe. If we are really determined to increase confidence, it is obviously essential that the measures to be agreed should be militarily significant, verifiable and mandatory. I do not underestimate the difficulties which we shall face when we come to negotiate detailed measures at the Conference. But there is a good chance of success and the importance of the matter is such that we should not be content to set ourselves any lesser task.

I cannot, on the other hand, accept your suggestion that there should be a moratorium on the deployment of new medium range nuclear missiles in Europe. Such a moratorium would serve merely to contractualise the serious imbalance of theatre nuclear forces which exists today. We remain committed to the double decision which we took with our Allies in December 1979. This provides both for the deployment of American theatre nuclear forces in Europe and for negotiations on this vitally important subject. We believe that any agreed limitation on these systems should be consistent with the principle of parity. That is the only basis for long term stability.

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You referred in your letter to stagnation in Anglo-Soviet relations. I do not disagree with this diagnosis, nor with your prescription of joint efforts as the remedy. Some of these efforts will have to be made in the wider international field, some in the purely bilateral. And it is by these efforts, much more than by words, that we shall judge and are ready to be judged. The British Government's policy is to pursue a consistent and constructive approach on all East/West issues. The challenge before us, and before other governments, is to translate the desire of our peoples for peace and cooperation into concrete action to build up confidence, strengthen security and develop our relations on a sound basis of mutual advantage. I am ready to work with you to this end. But I must conclude by emphasising that the situation in and around Poland continues to be in the forefront of my concerns. You will be aware of my position on this from the statement issued by me and my colleagues in the European Council in Maastricht on 23 March. We underlined the obligation of all States signatory to the Helsinki Final Act to base their relations with Poland on the strict application of the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of the Final Act. We emphasised that any other attitude would have very serious consequences for the future of international relations in Europe and throughout the world.