



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

22 May 1979

*Prime Minister**You asked about  
Para. 6 (a) of the  
minute below.**Jul  
22/5**P.M.  
24/5*

Dear Bryan,

Soviet Deployments in the Absence of SALT II

[below] You mentioned in your letter of 14 May that the Prime Minister would like to know the basis of the assessment in Lord Carrington's minute (PM/79/43) of 11 May that, in the absence of SALT II, the Soviet Union would probably have about 3,000 strategic weapon systems, with 30 or so MIRVs to each of their SS18s.

Calculations about Soviet deployment of strategic systems are based on the assumption that in the absence of SALT II the Russians would:

- (a) continue to produce new ICBMs of the SS17, 18 and 19 type at their present rate (around 125 a year) until 1985. Under SALT II they will have reached the MIRVed ICBM ceiling of 820 by 1982 and will thereafter have to cease production;
- (b) run on a number of the older Yankee class submarines (with around 144 missile tubes) which have several years life left in them. Under SALT II these are expected to be phased out early to allow the deployment of new SLBMs on the Typhoon submarine;
- (c) deploy the SS16 which is prohibited under SALT.

Taking these possibilities alone (and there may be others) the Russians could deploy, over and above their present holding (which we estimate at about 2370 systems), some 625 ICBMs in the SS17, 18 and 19 range as well as a number of SS16s. Our own intelligence is that the Russians have sufficient material and production facilities to realise these programmes.

We do not have a precise national estimate for Soviet deployments in 1985. The figure of 3,000 is however the standard American assessment which has been used in briefing the Alliance and members of the Nuclear Planning Group over the last year.

The statement that the Soviet SS18s could each carry about 30 MIRVs is based on the assumption that the Soviet Union could in the next five years resolve some of the present technical problems it faces in delivering very large numbers of MIRVs from a single missile. Our own intelligence community believes that

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the present warhead dispenser (or "Post Boost Vehicle") on the SS18 can carry a maximum of 12-14 warheads. The assessment that the Russians could produce a completely new dispenser carrying much larger numbers of warheads is made by a number of senior American officials in recent speeches on SALT II and is presumably based on what the Americans know of Soviet technological capabilities in this field. General Seignious, the Director of the US Government's Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, recently stated that "the Soviet SS18 heavy ICBM could pack 30 or more warheads rather than the 10 SALT will permit". Harold Brown, the US Secretary of Defence, stated on 9 May that the SS18 "could have 20, perhaps 40" warheads.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to the others members of OD and to Martin Vile (Cabinet Office).

*Yours ever*

*Paul*

P Lever  
Private Secretary

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