

OP's



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cc: fco

Subject file - Defense
INF - Pt 2

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

6 May 1980

PRIME MINISTER'S

PERSONAL MESSAGE

SERIAL No. T105/80

Dear Prime Minister,

Theatre Nuclear Forces (TNF)

I had hoped to have an opportunity to raise with you in Luxembourg the question of lifting your Government's reservation on basing American ground launched cruise missiles in Belgium. Unfortunately this proved impossible and, since the matter is of great importance to the Alliance, I am sending you a personal letter instead.

I fully understand the difficulties you face.

But I believe that a positive decision is essential. There are two reasons.

First, further postponement of the Belgian decision at this particular moment would be gravely damaging to the Alliance and to transatlantic relations. The Americans, rightly in my view, regard the TNF package agreed last December as evidence of their commitment to the defence of Europe. To put last December's achievement at risk now would impose a further major strain on relations with the Americans at a time when we in Europe can ill afford this.

Secondly, the decision last December to defer approval for basing the new American missiles in Belgium was intended to allow an assessment to be made of Soviet willingness to negotiate on TNF.

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As we are all aware, the Russians have been utterly uncompromising on arms control in spite of repeated American attempts to start discussions. I believe that the only way to bring the Russians to the negotiating table is to demonstrate that the Alliance is firm in its intention to modernise its theatre nuclear forces. Further delay in your decision would only encourage them to continue their attempts to undermine the modernisation programme and divide the Alliance, thus setting back the prospects for negotiating agreed limitations.

I hope therefore that in spite of your difficulties you will be able to take a positive decision in time for the Ankara meeting of the North Atlantic Council. If there is anything the British Government can do to help you to achieve this I hope you will not hesitate to let me know.

Yours sincerely
Margaret Thatcher

His Excellency Monsieur Wilfried Martens