



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

12 December 1983

My dear Archbishop,

Thank you very much for your letter of 29 November about the current state of East/West relations.

I welcome the fact that you accept the moral validity of deterrence for the time being and that the Roman Catholic Bishops of England and Wales have noted the recent decision of NATO Governments to make a major cut in the number of United States warheads held in Europe. This decision, taken at the end of October, has not yet received sufficient public attention; it will reduce the number of US nuclear weapons in Europe to their lowest level for 20 years and is proof of NATO's determination not to hold more weapons than we need to support deterrence.

You expressed concern at the technical modernisation of nuclear arms. I do not believe that modernisation programmes are taking place unchecked. These programmes are necessary if we are to maintain an effective deterrent. Our own programme to purchase the Trident system, for example, will be tailored to our need to maintain the minimum force level for a deterrent to be effective and credible at all times. Despite allegations to the contrary the number of warheads we shall deploy on our Trident missiles, for example, has not yet been decided. The modernisation of American strategic forces affects all three types of US strategic nuclear weapon - the land-based missiles, sea-based missiles and the strategic bombers. But there has been little or no modernisation of American forces for many years and over that period the threat posed to them, and to NATO as a whole, by Soviet strategic weapons has increased enormously. I nevertheless emphasise that our

/ commitment

MS

commitment to the search for balanced and verifiable arms control agreements remains as strong as ever.

I agree with your call for a reduction of hostility, friction and mistrust between nations. Given the nature of the Soviet system and its political aims the challenge which the Soviet Union makes to Western societies is likely to be with us for many years and it would be foolish to belittle the threat we face. But our aim is to strive to achieve a more constructive relationship with the Soviet Union, taking account of the wide difference of views on many important questions. We are ready to pursue, in the right circumstances, a sensible dialogue with the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe. In that spirit I shall be visiting Hungary early next year.

Yours sincerely,
Margaret Thatcher

His Eminence The Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster.