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c Sir Robert Armstrong

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Ballistic Missile Defence: United Kingdom Policy
towards the US Strategic Defence Initiative
(Meeting of Ministers on 7 November at 4 p.m.)

BACKGROUND

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In their joint minute MO26/7/2 of October 1984 the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Defence Secretary set out their views on how the United Kingdom should react to the United States Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI).

2. The background to this issue is set out in comprehensive terms in the Report by Officials attached to the Secretaries' of State minute. It sets out the arguments for and against SDI, including the choice between comprehensive and partial ballistic missile defence (BMD); costs; and implications for arms control. It also points up the risk to the effectiveness of the United Kingdom's national deterrent if SDI provoked the Soviets into increasing their own ballistic missile defences.

3. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Defence Secretary urge that the Government should "define its position" and play "a full and constructive role" in the Alliance and public debate about SDI. They fear that President Reagan may commit the new Administration to the SDI unless the Americans' European allies succeed, before the inaugural speech in January, in bringing home to the Administration the damaging consequences of doing so.

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HANDLING

4. You will wish to invite the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Defence Secretary to introduce their papers. Thereafter, the central issue for discussion will be their political recommendations for handling the subject, rather than the Report by Officials which is a clear, comprehensive and well-argued document. You may wish first to clarify some of the implications arising from an early and firm approach to the United States to express our reservations, before turning to the question of arms control. Points to clarify are -

a. President Reagan's commitment to SDI.

The SDI has figured quite prominently in the Presidential campaign. President Reagan has already re-affirmed his commitment to the concept on more than one occasion, most recently in the second televised debate with Mr Mondale. Even Mr Mondale has stated at least twice that, despite his opposition to the deployment of a BMD, research into the SDI concept should continue. Is it realistic to suppose that, however vigorously we put out views across in Washington, we could persuade President Reagan and his pro-SDI advisers, before the end of the year, to see the error of their ways and abandon a highly publicised plank of the Republican platform? The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary should be asked to comment.

b. The desirability of intervening with the United States

Even if we could restrain the Administration, is it desirable? What exactly are we aiming to do? The paper makes it very clear (particularly in Annex C) that the Soviet Union has already engaged in quite substantial research and development on certain elements of a BMD: if the Americans were to be prevailed upon to stop the

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SDI in its tracks, would the Russians thereby be inhibited from pursuing their own research and development programme? A United States self-denying ordinance accompanied by a continuing Soviet BMD programme would surely be more destabilising than any scenario envisaged in the paper. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Defence Secretary should comment.

5. Turning to arms control, the United States and the Soviet Union have already subscribed - in different ways - to the objective of preventing an arms race in space through a United States/Soviet negotiation leading to verifiable bans on the testing or deployment of certain types of weapon or device. The following issues arise from this:

c. Prospects for negotiation if the SDI were abandoned

What would be the prospects for a negotiation getting off the ground if the United States were to abandon the SDI? Would not this remove any incentive on the part of the Soviet Union to negotiate away their own research and development programme? Would it not be preferable, in arms control terms, for the Americans to stay on their present course and be seen by the Russians to be doing so? The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary should comment.

d. Soviet perceptions of SDI

There is ample evidence that the Soviet leadership is more worried about United States intentions in the BMD field than about any other aspect of United States military activity. Romanov commented in Helsinki last month that the arms race in space was a much more important issue than Pershing or Cruise deployment. The Americans thus possess, even with the SDI in its infancy, what could turn out to be a powerful lever for arms control

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negotiations. As Dr Kissinger among others has pointed out this leverage could perhaps be applied not only to initiating and prosecuting negotiations about the militarisation of space as such but also to securing a resumption of the nuclear arms control negotiations which have lapsed (START and INF). Should we be urging the Americans to throw this leverage away? The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Defence Secretary should comment.

e. Implications of public criticism of the United States position

Would not public criticism of United States policies by the European allies only weaken the American hand, and strengthen that of the Russians, in any negotiation which may eventually take place? The process of INF deployment in 1983 graphically demonstrated the crucial importance of a united public front as between the leading allies, whatever division of opinion may exist in private allied counsels or in Western public opinion. In public, should we not concentrate on the desirability of negotiations and an eventual agreement on the military use of space rather than on the flaws in the SDI concept as such? The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary should comment.

CONCLUSIONS

6. Subject to the discussion of these issues, you may wish to guide the Meeting to the conclusion that United Kingdom officials should be authorised to discuss the SDI in depth with the Americans and other leading allies with the following themes -

a. urging the necessity for early negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union about arms control in space, if possible using this prospect to bring about



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the resumption of the other nuclear arms control negotiations as well;

b. acknowledgement that in order to achieve this result it will probably be necessary for the United States to be seen to be pursuing SDI research;

c. indication that for so long as the arms control objective is being seriously pursued, HMG will abstain - as in the case of prospective United States resumption of chemical weapons manufacture - from public criticism of United States activity in the SDI field, taking the line that to the extent that such activity may contribute to an eventual agreement on arms control in space it is to be welcomed; and that we will commend this public stance to our allies; but accompanied by -

d. a firm and thorough exposition of our reservations concerning the whole SDI concept which would make it difficult for us to support any eventual United States decision to proceed from the stage of research to that of development.

Bryan Cartledge

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2 November 1984

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