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PRIME MINISTER

STRATEGIC DEFENCE INITIATIVE: MR WEINBERGER'S VIEWS

Cap Weinberger and I attended last weekend's conference at Ditchley Park on "The US/UK Relationship in the Field of Defence and Security". The Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) was a major talking point, and I thought you might find it useful to have an account of his remarks on the subject.

2. Weinberger made strong claims for the SDI. The aim of the initiative was clear: to achieve an absolutely reliable defensive system which allowed missiles to be destroyed by non-nuclear means outside the atmosphere. Each side would be rendered absolutely invulnerable. Both the US and the Russians were roughly equal in offensive weapons. The Russians for their part were also "very defensive minded"; they were spending a lot on defence endeavours. He had "rather complete" confidence that the SDI would work. Indeed he took encouragement from the consensus among scientists that the goal was not achievable; Einstein himself had been a lone voice. The US would not want to stop at research. They would share the technology. Allies must not worry that the SDI would turn the US into "fortress America". The cost would be much less than that of carrying on indefinitely with the improvement of offensive systems. As long as the present administration was in office, it would press ahead, and he hoped that America's friends would join in the effort.

3. Weinberger seemed little concerned, if at all, with the significance of the SDI for the forthcoming arms control negotiations. He took no account of the prospect that if the goal of a complete defence proves unattainable, the SDI will provide an incentive towards the multiplication of offensive systems and a further spiral in the arms race. I see



little hope for securing reductions in offensive systems at Geneva if, as he appeared to imply, the intention to proceed with the SDI, beyond the research phase if research proves fruitful, is inflexible. His remarks strongly reinforce what should, I believe, be our main objective next week in Washington of persuading President Reagan that while research on the SDI is a prudent hedge against Soviet efforts and must continue, anything beyond that must, in the spirit of the four points agreed between you and the President last month, be a matter for negotiation.

4. I am copying this to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

WJH

Ministry of Defence
15th February 1985

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