



Prime Minister

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

28 February 1985

I'm pretty sure that  
this letter is based  
on a report which I  
saw in Aviation Week.

We need to establish officially  
exactly what the Americans  
intend to do, before we make

Dear Charles, any sort of protest.

CDP  
20/2.SDI Testing/ABM Treaty

During her press conference in Washington on 21 February the Prime Minister emphasised the "many, many years" which would have to elapse between starting research on ballistic missile defence and coming to any possibility of deployment. This has hitherto been our clear understanding of the proposed US time-scale for the SDI, on the basis of numerous briefings from the Americans themselves, most recently confirmed by Nitze's speech on 20 February to the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia ("... it will not be for many, many years, perhaps well into the next century").

You may however like to be aware of a recent development which shows the fragility of this timetable in the hands of at least one important US spokesman. US press reports last week quoted General Abrahamson, Director of the SDI programme in the Pentagon, as saying that the schedule for some aspects of testing in space of tracking and targeting systems against missiles had been brought forward by two years to 1987. As part of the new testing programme, it was also reported that the US could use "active ballistic missile targets". This would in itself appear to demonstrate an ABM intention. However, Article V(i) of the ABM Treaty specifically bans the development, testing or deployment of space-based ABM systems or components. To that extent, these reports give rise for concern about the possible impact on the Treaty of this new move.

Official US statements to Congress at the time of the Treaty's ratification in 1972 support the view that field testing beyond the laboratory stage is prohibited. In the words of the major White House statement on the SDI of 3 January, the Treaty "does permit research short of field testing of a prototype ABM system or component. This is the type of research that will be conducted under the SDI program". General Abrahamson assured the NATO Allies in Brussels on 14 February that all testing under the SDI research programme had been independently examined to ensure conformity with the Treaty. On the other hand, some US officials have begun to argue that field testing of SDI-related technologies is permissible under the Treaty, on the grounds that these are not solely applicable to BMD purposes and do not constitute stand-alone substitutes for an existing or deployable ABM system.

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There is a clear possibility that such arguments will increasingly be used to justify steps along the BMD road that appear to run counter to President Reagan's repeated assertion that the SDI involved only research, as permitted under the ABM Treaty; to Mr McFarlane's statement to the Prime Minister on 9 January that "the US wanted to restore the integrity (of the Treaty)"; and to the assertion in the President's Report of 5 February to Congress on Soviet compliance that one of the US objectives in the Geneva negotiations is "to reverse the erosion of the ABM Treaty". Piecemeal activities relevant to the grey areas of the Treaty could risk undoing its central provisions much sooner than would otherwise be expected. (This might not be regretted by some in the Pentagon such as Mr Richard Perle, who has said that the Treaty "was a mistake in 1972 and the sooner we face up to the implications of recognising that mistake the better".) In any case, increased public interest can be expected in these aspects of Treaty compliance, which have already evoked some predictable criticism from the Russians. The latter will inevitably seek to capitalise on the contrast between SDI activities and US accusations (which at this stage we are not in a position entirely to endorse) of Soviet violations of the ABM Treaty.

Sir Geoffrey Howe therefore proposes that officials should engage the Americans in further discussion of General Abrahamson's latest remarks, at the next convenient opportunity. (The topic is also likely to arise in the course of discussion with our major European Allies.) Our aim would be to reach, if possible, a common and publicly defensible position on how the potential ambiguities in the Treaty should be interpreted.

I am sending copies of this letter to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence), and to Richard Hatfield and Bryan Cartledge (Cabinet Office).

*MS*

*Yours ever,*

*Le Appleyard*

(L V Appleyard)  
Private Secretary

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