



PM/85/72

PRIME MINISTER

Prime Minister  
CDP  
24/7.

*Put in  
Washington  
before*

Soviet Compliance with Arms Control Agreements:  
Implications for British Policy

1. I thought you might like to have a note before your visit to Washington this week about the implications of the JIC assessment (JIC(85)(N)65 of 11 July) that by no means all the American charges of widespread Soviet breaches of Treaty obligations are substantiated. The JIC conclude that the main trouble is that the Russians use loopholes in loosely-drafted agreements, not clear-cut violations.

2. This difference of interpretation is, I know, familiar to you. In any case, whatever the strict scientific facts and legalities, the US Administration feel strongly that Soviet exploitation of ambiguous Treaties and refusal to respond adequately to US concerns undermines the spirit and objectives of arms control. I can quite understand the US sense of frustration. There is, however, a risk that, if the Administration try to push their arguments too far, the Russians will get new opportunities for wedge-driving in NATO (not least because some other allies are less sensitive than we are to the Americans' anxieties). Some US officials want to go still further and to use accusations of Soviet non-compliance to justify an approach to the SDI programme which takes no account of the arms control dimension, and in some cases to undermine the entire arms control process. Neither outcome would be in our interests.

3. I think it was a considerable achievement that, thanks in large part to your own message, President Reagan decided to maintain the SALT II constraints. But officials have been tasked

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to report by November on "proportionate US responses" to uncorrected Soviet non-compliance. This means that the US definition of the extent to which the Soviet Union is complying with the Treaty will have a crucial effect on the wider decisions to be taken by President Reagan. By then the context in which discussion will take place will be the Reagan/Gorbachev Summit, in which arms control will inevitably be the primary focus. The fact that the Soviets certainly continue to observe the bulk of their obligations, and the ambiguous nature of the evidence on the disputed cases, indicate that the Russians still see it as in their long-term interests to adhere to arms control agreements. I think this underlines the need to strengthen the arms control structure rather than to see it eroded.

4. As the debate continues the Russians are bound to attack the US's own record. They will allege double standards over the Midgetman ICBM, whose testing or deployment would (we all agree) be a breach of SALT II, and over the SDI programme, which they will say runs contrary to the spirit of the ABM Treaty and would be contrary to the letter if it moved beyond research. Accusations over modernisation of the Fylingdales BMEW radar are likely to involve us directly in the debate.

5. My judgement, against this background, is that our public line should remain that the siting and characteristics of the Krasnoyarsk radar give rise to serious questions in connection with the ABM Treaty which will need resolution if the Treaty is to be protected from erosion and progress is to be made towards further arms control agreements. We should concentrate on welcoming the President's decision to observe the limits imposed by arms control agreements. Meanwhile, we should be robust with the Russians and continue to press them on the major issues of concern, particularly Krasnoyarsk.

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6. With our Allies we should take the line that the Russians have a serious case to answer, but should not go further than our own assessment of the evidence leads us. With the Americans themselves we should make it clear that we will join in pressing the Soviets to answer the US case. Nevertheless, we believe that the Americans would be wise to avoid exaggerated accusations which can only damage their argument, and should persevere in their efforts to achieve practical solutions which build on existing agreements, rather than discard them. We should also underline the difficulties which US abandonment of arms control would pose for Alliance management at a time when unilateralist pressures still need to be resisted strongly in most NATO countries.

7. I am sending copies of this minute to Michael Heseltine and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

(GEOFFREY HOWE)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
24 July 1985

