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 PS/Lady Young
 Mr. Omit
 Mr. Goodhall
 Mr. Derek Thomas
 Mr. Alston
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 NAT
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 News Dept
 PT, 19/85



PM/85/79

DSG 083/35.

RECEIVED IN REGISTRY

11 SEP 1985

PRIME MINISTERGeneva Arms Control Talks: Western Strategy

1. My Private Secretary has written separately in response to the request in your Private Secretary's letter of 31 July for a draft message which you might send to President Reagan on the handling of the November Summit.
2. As explained in that letter, the prospects of concrete arms control agreements emerging from the November Summit are not at present good. I therefore believe that we should be cautious about pressing specific ideas about the arms control negotiations on the US Administration at this stage. But, as you yourself told Secretary Weinberger in Washington last July, we must still look to the Summit to provide the Geneva negotiations with a fresh impetus. At the least, the Summit may produce agreement on further high-level meetings designed to advance the Geneva talks. It is therefore in my view none too soon to consider how we can best influence the process in a direction helpful to our interests, and how to make the best of our on-going exchanges with the Americans on this subject.
3. Against this background, I asked officials to work up some ideas which might be developed in the course of Alliance consultations about the Geneva negotiations. The attached paper, which has been prepared in consultation with MOD officials, and with whose thrust I understand Michael Heseltine to be generally content, builds upon thinking which was initially reflected in the briefing prepared for your visits to Washington in December and February and later elaborated in further contacts with the Americans. It is not a blueprint for a US/Soviet agreement,

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rather a quarry of negotiating possibilities which can be drawn upon in briefing for future exchanges over the coming months. The suggestions made in the paper, if pursued by the Americans, would certainly help to impel the negotiations in the direction of the longer-term strategy we hope to see them develop.

4. The paper does not address the separate chemical weapons ban negotiations in Geneva. Officials have as instructed been discussing with the Americans the major problem of the contentious Article X of the US draft Treaty. Resistance on the part of the US Department of Defence to any amendment to the present US concept of "no refusal" inspection has meant little progress has been made. I may need to consult you at a later stage if the impasse, which has blocked possible progress at Geneva, continues. But at this stage I do not believe a specific reference to this point in your message to the President is merited.

5. I am sending a copy of this minute to Michael Heseltine and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'G. Howe', is written above the name in parentheses.

(GEOFFREY HOWE)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
6 September 1985

CONFIDENTIAL

GENEVA ARMS CONTROL TALKS : WESTERN STRATEGY

Introduction

1. This paper addresses the state-of-play in the current Geneva talks, and suggests an approach over the coming months which would be consistent with Western interests and could assist the negotiations to make progress. It reflects and tries to elaborate upon ideas which have already been addressed in bilateral contacts with the Americans, both at Ministerial and official level. There is an obvious limit to the extent to which even the closest Allies can exert a decisive influence over US strategy. Nonetheless, the following points are put forward as a starting-point for further consultations with them, and perhaps other close Allies.

CURRENT POSITION

2. The strategic balance has altered since the SALT I agreement was signed. The shift has been in favour of the Soviet Union, although the US continues to lead in some significant areas. The extent of this change should not be exaggerated. The Scowcroft Report of 1983 recognised, and President Reagan agreed, that there was no immediate danger to strategic stability, and concern about the vulnerability of US ICBM forces was alleviated by the fact that the Soviet Union could not eliminate US ICBM fields, submarines and bomber bases simultaneously. The Report recognised at the same time the importance of modernisation programmes, in order to strengthen all three legs of the US strategic triad.

3. New and complex issues have been introduced into the strategic equation in recent years, notably the long-range cruise missile (particularly when based on submarine platforms) and the mobile ICBM. Both will need addressing in the new round of strategic arms talks. Nonetheless, while in 1983 the positions of the two super-powers in a START negotiation were ostensibly far apart, possible avenues of accommodation between them could even then be identified. Recent developments suggest that there remain real chances for progress in this area. In the field of intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF), such relative optimism would not be easily justified. The Soviet Union apparently remains wedded to the principle that they will not accept the stationing of

new US missiles of this type in Europe.

4. The renewed emphasis on ballistic missile defences as a factor in the strategic equation, engendered by the SDI and concern about Soviet research, has imposed a qualitative change on the traditional debate, and added a special complication. Although radical restructuring of the forces on either side would take many years, the notion of sharp cuts in current offensive forces is now accepted at least in principle by both sides. But it is most unlikely that either would accept such cuts so long as the future of strategic defences is allowed to run free. And US insistence on deep offensive reductions is matched by their present determination to accept no long-term constraints on SDI research.

5. A wider and more basic problem is the enduring difference between US and Soviet perceptions. The US continue to see a need to redress the long-standing Soviet advantage in a particular type of strategic forces (ICBMs), while seeking to avoid tight constraints on new technologies in which they still lead over the Soviet Union. On the other hand, having made strenuous and largely successful efforts to catch up with the Americans over the past two decades, the basic Soviet interest could now be said to be the maintenance of the status quo in terms of the strategic balance.

6. There is a further aspect to this difference between US and Soviet perceptions. Their time-scales for decision-making on procurement of new weapons systems have never been identical and continue to be out of step. It has become progressively harder to identify a moment at which successful talks could codify a de facto balance, especially when the factors relevant to any agreement have increased in complexity and sensitivity. Each side perceives itself as about to be overtaken by the other, and as a result sets in motion a series of procurement decisions whose results only become evident in a number of years. Such decisions are generally irrevocable, but in the meantime they serve as an impetus to the other side to take another step down the modernisation track.

SOVIET/US VIEWS

7. Currently the Soviet leaders appear dedicated to two main objectives: the constraint of the US technological potential to develop strategic defences, and limits on new US offensive forces. At this stage the Russians show no signs of having decided to negotiate seriously. For the time being they probably see sufficient potential to undermine US positions by playing on weaknesses in Alliance unity and by mobilising public pressure both from Europeans and within the US through a mixture of public negotiating "initiatives" and attacks on US policy. An eye-catching move in connection with the November Summit, which could include elements of genuine attraction to the US, cannot be excluded; but this is likely to stop short of providing a real breakthrough at Geneva. Soviet thinking will continue to reflect security over-insurance and conservative military assumptions. They will want to ensure that any steps towards the US taken in order to achieve constraints on SDI will not seriously jeopardise key elements in their offensive weapons modernisation programme.

8. In Washington the Administration and the President remain firmly committed to pursuing the arms control track. Nonetheless, recent evidence of what the Americans perceive as Soviet non-compliance with their arms control obligations gives them cause for serious concern, not least because of the apparent Soviet unwillingness to address Western anxieties seriously (although there have been some signs of readiness to justify how they abide by the rules through limited discussion in the SCC). The issue has been elevated into a debate within Washington about the future of arms control, with some wishing to use the debate to destroy the whole process, especially as it applies to the ABM Treaty and the SALT agreements. The President's decision on 10 June to stay within current constraints does not mean the end of the battle, which is likely to flare up again just before the Summit in November. Any attempt to impose firm constraints on future US offensive deployments and, more sensitive, the further evolution of strategic defences will meet with stern opposition. The Administration have stated that they will not accept a Soviet veto on such programmes, although this is not the same as refusing an agreed series of constraints; and of course the attitude of future US Administrations cannot reliably be

forecast. So long as the Russians show few signs of interest in substantive discussions, however, there will be little US disposition to grapple with the tough issues which a more flexible negotiating position for Geneva would involve.

PROSPECTS

9. Against this background the present prospects for success at Geneva are not encouraging. There has until now been no reason to argue for the US to give thought to new negotiating positions, let alone to launch new US initiatives. Public pressure remains at a low level, and a significant shift in negotiating positions would have been inappropriate. The immediate priority ^{has} ~~is~~ ^{been} to maintain Alliance cohesion in the face of Soviet propaganda tactics. They should not be allowed to force constraints on the West away from the negotiating table.

10. Nonetheless, a new negotiating concept takes time to develop. If the US is to be able to move swiftly when the moment is ripe with the prospect of full Allied support, then it is no longer premature to start injecting into US thinking some more detailed ideas for ways in which the negotiations could usefully develop. Such an approach has to recognise that the US alone is at the negotiating table: but that the outcome of the negotiations will profoundly affect the strategic interests of the Allies.

11. The answer may lie in a deliberate effort

- (i) to limit the duration of arms control agreements,
- (ii) expand the scope of agreements in terms of weapons and of forces covered; but
- (iii) to avoid linkage between agreements unless demonstrably essential and/or advantageous to the West.

The arms control process has always struggled to catch up with technological developments, which continually overtake agreements and render them increasingly irrelevant. To recognise that arms control and technology must interact is both realistic and may point a useful way ahead. If such an approach is adopted (and it has already been hinted as the most fruitful approach by some senior US

officials) it could be composed of the following elements.

NEGOTIATING POSSIBILITIES

12. An interim regime could be constructed to incorporate further constraints on offensive forces, beyond those already imposed by the present SALT agreements. Such a core agreement might last for perhaps the next decade. It would be based on a compromise between the US requirement for reductions in throwweight and numbers of warheads, and the original Soviet insistence on limiting only launchers. Signs of Soviet and US flexibility on such a compromise are beginning to emerge. The agreement would also need to:

- address future modernisation programmes (perhaps through one of the variations on the approach known as "build-down", where old systems are replaced by fewer but better systems);
- establish acceptable conditions for ICBM mobility;
- address the long-range cruise missile problem;
- achieve reduced levels of LRINF forces on each side.

Such an agreement could be represented as establishing "an interim framework of truly mutual restraint on strategic offensive arms" the terms in which President Reagan defined near-term US aims in his 10 June statement on SALT limits.

13. The existing regime of restraints should be maintained over the same period. This would need to contain some important sub-elements:

- (a) a continuing commitment would be needed to maintain the SALT regime and its accompanying limitations, coupled with a vigorous effort to resolve compliance issues through co-operation within the US/Soviet bilateral Special Consultative Committee (SCC). The US readiness to follow this path until now is most welcome and should be encouraged;

- (b) Particular care should be taken to keep underreview one item of special military significance - the mobile ICBM (exemplified in the case of the Soviet Union by the SS-X 25 and of the US by the proposed Midgetman). The timetable for the introduction of both systems may conceivably make it possible to accomodate them within future reductions, although the more advanced Soviet development of the SS-X-25 will make a direct balance hard to negotiate. The effect upon the strategic balance and upon strategic stability of mobile systems (which reduce the threat to each side of a successful first strike by the other) needs to be weighed against the military disadvantages of the targetting difficulties to which such systems give rise;
- (c) the ABM Treaty should continue to be given full political support and its erosion prevented. This would involve in particular a clarification of the borderline between research and development (in terms of the Treaty); and the meaning of critical but ambiguous terms such as "an ABM component", "an ABM sub-component" and "testing in an ABM mode". Further understandings might also be necessary on the potential ABM applications of surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) or anti-tactical ballistic missiles (ATBMs). The purpose of this activity would be on the one hand to constrain a Soviet potential for the rapid extension of conventional ABM systems; and to establish on the other the basis for a clear distinction between the research and development phases of both the SDI and the equivalent Soviet programme.
- (d) A further and useful elaboration of this concept would involve commitments not to enter particular phases of defensive programmes before certain specified dates. An extension to 5 years of the period of notice required to withdraw from the Treaty has been canvassed as a means of reaffirming the stability of the Treaty regime. This seems likely to run into determined opposition in Washington. Nonetheless, if agreed arrangements were reached to govern offensive and defensive developments over a significant period of time, it should not prove impossible to secure at least informal agreement on such

an extension.

14. In summary, the aim would be to establish an element of predictability, in terms of possible defensive developments, against which offensive force deployments and programme decisions must be matched over the next decade. The key point here is not to try to establish any form of formal constraint which would foreclose US options to proceed further with defensive developments within their own timescales, ie the mid-1990s onwards; but to achieve sufficient inhibitions to allow room for offensive reductions to take place in the meantime against the background of the predictable shape and scope of future defences. The net result would be to allow research to continue on both sides on defensive possibilities, while establishing an equitable balance of offensive forces over the next decade; in other words, to achieve the objective the US Administration proclaims: preservation of stable deterrence based on a mix of offensive force reductions now and the possibility of defensive deployments in the longer-term future.

15. Finally, a further attempt should be made to reach some sort of negotiated agreement on the testing and deployment of anti-satellite (ASAT) systems, and in particular a ban on high level ASATs. Earlier studies by UK officials concluded that there could well be advantage to the West in the sort of time-limited agreements covering certain elements of anti-satellite activity which could complement a broader regime covering both offensive and strategic defensive forces. Their continued development puts at risk the present key strategic assets (in the form of communications and surveillance satellites) on which the security of both sides rests. There is admittedly a difficulty in ASAT constraints, in that there is a degree of complementarity between ASAT and BMD systems. Nonetheless, the relevant time-scales for deployment differ sufficiently to allow for an interim measure of constraint on the former without jeopardising the prospects for developing the latter. ASATs are already deployed by the Soviet Union; and likely to be shortly deployed by the US. An agreement which limited

both sides to the present or predicted deployments over a time-scale of the next decade and banned the testing or deployment of high-level ASATs over a similar, extendable period, would introduce an element of both stability and predictability, which could only be helpful to the preservation of stable deterrence.