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CC: USA - United 5
Via President Bush to UK
June 1981



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

9 February 1983

~~Prime Minister~~

A.S.C. 9/2.

John Tanner

Secretary of State's discussion with Vice-President Bush:

9 February: Defence Issues

The Secretary of State raised defence issues very briefly with Vice-President Bush this morning, making clear that the Prime Minister would wish to go into detail on the subject this evening. He said that we remained fully convinced that the zero/zero option would be by far the best outcome to negotiations, and that HMG fully supported the US in that aim. While not abandoning that objective, and at the point in the negotiations when it became absolutely clear that the Russians would not accept it, it would be important to consider the possibilities of an intermediate solution, provided that it was firmly based on the principle of balance. It was of course axiomatic that if we moved towards an intermediate solution, deployment must take place. In the UK view, the moment to move from the zero option might be very close, although in Mr Pym's personal view it might be best to leave it until after the FRG elections. It was very difficult to judge what the effect of any move before the FRG elections might be. Perhaps the best moment might be very soon thereafter.

Bush said that these comments were very helpful. He would of course be reporting all his European consultations very carefully to the President. He had been at pains, in particular, to dispel any illusion that the US Government was not interested in negotiating constructively about arms reductions. In particular, President Reagan's open message had been carefully designed to shoot down the myth that the President was not prepared to meet Andropov. Mr Pym said that there was no doubt about the strength of support and admiration in the UK for the US defence commitment to Europe. He was bound to say, however, that on occasions some of the language used in Washington about defence issues had tended to frighten public opinion, eg reference to limited nuclear war, and the confused signals about MX siting. There had also been a suspicion that Reagan's message to Andropov had

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perhaps been unfortunately couched, ie in terms which would make it impossible for the Russians to react constructively. The Vice President said that he was particularly grateful to hear these impressions, but slightly surprised by the latter point. It was very important to know exactly how Western European opinion reacted. His own judgement was that Chancellor Kohl greatly welcomed the open message to Andropov, as indeed had the Dutch. In the FRG in particular it had served to take some of the heat out of public opposition to deployment. Mr Pym said that, if that had been the effect, then the open message had been indeed very worthwhile. His own comment on the open message was directed primarily to the impact he sensed it might have had in the United Kingdom.

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram at the Ministry of Defence.

(R B Bone)
Private Secretary

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