

Ref: B06900

MR COLES

Arms Control and Disarmament

In your minute to Sir Robert Armstrong of 17 October you recorded the Prime Minister's wish for a paper on INF and START which would examine the scope for a British arms control initiative. The paper was to be for discussion "by an appropriate group of Ministers in the next few weeks".

2. When you and I discussed this at the time I suggested that the right moment for Ministers to review the state of the arms control negotiations and to consider the scope for a possible British initiative would not be until after the German Bundestag debate on 21 November. It would then finally be clear whether cruise missile/ Pershing 2 deployment was going ahead on schedule and whether the Russians had any fresh initiative up their sleeve designed to throw the Alliance off course.

3. I have discussed the Prime Minister's remit with those concerned in the FCO and MOD and the preparation of the paper has been put in hand. On timing, the Prime Minister will be away from 21-30 November at the CHOGM; thereafter the Defence Secretary will be attending the Defence Planning Committee in Brussels, which leads into the NATO Council meeting which the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary will be attending. The earliest practicable time for a Ministerial discussion will therefore be in the week beginning 12 December. We are treating this as the deadline for circulating the paper. By that time the Defence Secretary hopes also to have circulated his promised paper on chemical weapons and the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to have circulated a paper on non-proliferation (items (a) and (d) in paragraph 8 of Sir Robert Armstrong's minute to the Prime Minister of 11 October.

4. The paper by officials will review the state of play in the arms control negotiations (INF, START, MBFR and CDE) and will aim to indicate areas in which there may be scope for movement and possibly some British initiative or initiatives to that end. The main area of likely movement in the immediate future will be CDE, which opens on 17 January and where the Alliance has a comprehensive package of proposals virtually ready to put on the table. But if we are right in expecting

the Russians to walk out of the INF (and possibly START) negotiations shortly after cruise missile deployment begins, mid-December is unlikely to be the right moment for taking decisions about possible initiatives in the INF/START context. It will by then still be too early to judge the reactions of our principal allies, especially the Americans, French and Germans, to what may turn out to be the interruption or collapse of the Geneva negotiations; and a good deal of inter allied consultation will be needed before we can define the options which may be open to the British Government in the new situation. From this point of view it may make more sense for Ministers to address the issues in January rather than in December. I gathered from a discussion between Sir Robert Armstrong and Mr Butler yesterday that this might also be more convenient from the point of view of the Prime Minister's timetable. Decisions on the chemical weapons and non-proliferation papers could, if necessary, also wait until then. Perhaps you would like to consider this and let me have your views.

5. I am sending copies of this minute to Mr Brian Fall (FCO) and Mr Richard Mottram (MOD) and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

David Goodall

11 November 1983

A D S GOODALL

Defence Army Control

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From the Private Secretary

MR. GOODALL
CABINET OFFICE

Arms Control and Disarmament

Thank you for your minute of 11 November.

I note the arguments for postponing the proposed Ministerial meeting on arms control issues until January but I am clear that the Prime Minister would find this too long a delay. I think, therefore, that we should aim for a meeting as early in December as is practicable. I do not think the Prime Minister envisages this meeting taking the form of a seminar. It would rather be a Ministerial meeting, perhaps with officials present, to take such decisions as are necessary. For example, I note that you say that the Alliance has a comprehensive package of proposals virtually ready to put on the table at the CDE. The Prime Minister has no knowledge of this package of proposals. Decisions may also be necessary on some of the ideas which the Canadian Prime Minister has been ventilating.

BF I should therefore be grateful if arrangements could be made for a meeting and if a proposed agenda could be put to me for consideration by the Prime Minister after her return from the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting.

I am copying this minute to Mr. Fall (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Mr. Mottram (Ministry of Defence).

A. J. COLES

18 November 1983

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