

PRIORITY

S E C R E T

SECRET

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TO PRIORITY F C O

TELEGRAM NUMBER 602 OF 21 FEBRUARY

INFO PRIORITY UKDEL NATO, BONN, PARIS, MOSCOW. MODUK (A3A).

MIRT (NOT TO ALL): CALL ON WEINBERGER BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR DEFENCE, 20 FEBRUARY: SDI

1. PERLE REFERRED TO A POINT MADE BY THE PRIME MINISTER EARLIER
IN THE DAY ABOUT THE ORIGINS OF MIRVED SYSTEMS. HE DID NOT THINK
IT WAS TRUE, AS THE PRIME MINISTER HAD SUGGESTED, THAT INTEREST
IN MIRVED SYSTEMS HAD ARISEN OUT OF CONCERN ABOUT ABM SYSTEMS.
RATHER THE US MIRV PROGRAMME HAD GROWN OUT OF US STRATEGIC
DOCTRINE IN THE EARLY 1960'S WHICH HAD CALLED FOR THE US TO BE
ABLE TO STRIKE A RETALIATORY BLOW AGAINST A FIXED PERCENTAGE
(ABOUT 70 PERCENT) OF THE SOVIET INDUSTRIAL BASE. THE
OVER-MECHANISTIC APPLICATION OF THIS DOCTRINE HAD RESULTED IN A
PERCEIVED NEED FOR LARGER NUMBERS OF US WARHEADS. SINCE PRESIDENT
KENNEDY HAD EARLIER TAKEN A DECISION NOT TO EXCEED A LEVEL OF
1,000 MISSILES, A PROGRAMME FOR MIRVING MISSILES HAD GROWN OUT
OF THE NEED TO INCREASE THE DESTRUCTIVE CAPABILITY OF THE US
STRATEGIC ARSENAL IE WARHEADS WHILE REMAINING WITHIN THE CEILING
OF 1,000 BALLISTIC MISSILES.

(SHB/CHY)

/2. ON

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MR GREEN
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MR SHEINWALD

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S E C R E T

2. ON THE SDI GENERALLY, MR HESELTINE REFERRED TO THE OUTCOME OF THE CAMP DAVID MEETING ON 22 DECEMBER, WHICH PROVIDED A SOUND POSITION. BUT WE SHOULD STILL NEED TO GUARD AGAINST SOVIET WEDGE-DRIVING. THERE WERE A NUMBER OF UNDERLYING QUESTIONS ON WHICH WE NEEDED TO BE SURE OF THE WEST'S POSITION. FOR EXAMPLE, IT WAS VERY DIFFICULT TO ARGUE THE NEED FOR THE MODERNISATION OF NATO'S NUCLEAR SYSTEMS EG UK TRIDENT AND LRINF WHILE AT THE SAME TIME IMPLYING THAT SUCH SYSTEMS WOULD NOT IN THE FUTURE BE NECESSARY. THE EUROPEAN ALLIES WERE BOUND ALSO TO HAVE A SECOND SET OF CONCERNS. EVEN IF IT PROVED POSSIBLE TO DEFEND AGAINST BALLISTIC MISSILES AND HIGH-LEVEL CRUISE MISSILES, EUROPE WOULD STILL BE HELD AT RISK BY LOW-LEVEL CRUISE MISSILES AND TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS. HOW WERE EUROPEAN CONCERNS IN THIS RESPECT TO BE ALLAYED?

3. WEINBERGER SAID THAT THE US WAS SHOWING BY ITS ACTIONS THAT IT WOULD CONTINUE TO BE VITAL IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE TO MAINTAIN A FULL OFFENSIVE NUCLEAR CAPABILITY. THE US WAS NOT ABANDONING ITS OFFENSIVE NUCLEAR SYSTEMS. ON THE CONTRARY, THE ADMINISTRATION WERE MODERNISING ALL ASPECTS OF THE STRATEGIC TRIAD. AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, THE ADMINISTRATION WISHED TO LEARN HOW TO DEFEND AGAINST BALLISTIC MISSILES. THIS WAS NOT BECAUSE THE US WANTED SUPERIORITY AND, IF DEPLOYMENTS IN DUE COURSE SEEMED DESIRABLE, IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO MODIFY THE ABM TREATY IN WAYS PERMITTED BY THAT TREATY (IT WAS TOO EARLY TO SAY PRECISELY WHAT THE CORRECT POLICY TOWARDS THE ABM TREATY WOULD BE AT THAT FUTURE POINT). MEANWHILE, THE SDI RESEARCH PROGRAMME WAS GOING EXTREMELY WELL. BUT THE LATE 1990'S WAS THE EARLIEST TIME AT WHICH A SYSTEM OF DEFENCES AGAINST BALLISTIC MISSILES COULD BE DEPLOYED. IF SUCH A SYSTEM COULD BE DEVELOPED, IT WOULD BE EFFECTIVE AGAINST INTERMEDIATE RANGE BALLISTIC MISSILES AS WELL AS STRATEGIC SYSTEMS. BUT IT WAS QUITE TRUE THAT IT WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO DEFEND AGAINST BATTLEFIELD NUCLEAR WEAPONS. NEITHER WAS IT LIKELY THAT IT WOULD BE ABLE TO DEFEND AGAINST LOW-LEVEL CRUISE MISSILES ALTHOUGH THE ADMINISTRATION WERE WORKING ACTIVELY ON OTHER MEANS OF DOING THIS. IT WAS OF COURSE IN THE US INTEREST, AS WELL AS THE EUROPEAN INTEREST, TO DEVELOP A DEFENCE AGAINST LOW-LEVEL AND SHORT RANGE NUCLEAR SYSTEMS, FOR EXAMPLE TO NEUTRALISE THE THREAT POSED BY SOVIET SLBMS DEPLOYED CLOSE TO US COASTLINES. THE LOW-LEVEL NUCLEAR THREAT WAS THEREFORE A THREAT TO THE US AS WELL AS TO THE EUROPEAN ALLIES. MORE GENERALLY, IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE FOR THE US TO CONTEMPLATE A SITUATION IN WHICH THE EUROPEAN ALLIES WERE LEFT UNDEFENDED. THE DEFENCE OF EUROPE WAS THE DEFENCE OF THE US.

/4. MR

4. MR HESELTINE SAID THAT A SET OF MORE IMMEDIATE WORRIES CONCERNED THE PRESENTATION (FOR EXAMPLE BY BRITISH MINISTERS IN PARLIAMENT AND TO THE BRITISH PUBLIC) OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S OBJECTIVES IN THE FORTHCOMING ARMS CONTROL NEGOTIATIONS IN GENEVA. THE RUSSIANS WOULD PRESUMABLY ARGUE IN GENEVA THAT THERE WAS NO POSSIBILITY OF REDUCTIONS IN OFFENSIVE NUCLEAR SYSTEMS WHILE THERE WAS ANY PROSPECT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF A US DEFENSIVE SYSTEM AGAINST THEM. ON THE CONTRARY, THEY MIGHT WELL CONCLUDE THAT THE MOST APPROPRIATE SOVIET RESPONSE WOULD BE THE PROLIFERATION OF SOVIET OFFENSIVE SYSTEMS SO THAT THERE REMAINED A CERTAINTY OF BEING ABLE TO OVERWHELM US DEFENCES. ALTERNATIVELY OR ADDITIONALLY, THE RUSSIANS MIGHT DECIDE TO DEVELOP A DEFENSIVE SYSTEM OF THEIR OWN, OR TO DEVELOP COUNTER COUNTER MEASURES TO DEFEAT US DEFENSIVE SYSTEMS. SINCE IT WAS MORE OR LESS OUT OF THE QUESTION THAT A PERFECT AND SURVIVABLE DEFENSIVE SHIELD COULD BE ERECTED, THE MOST LIKELY OUTCOME OF THIS WHOLE PROCESS WOULD BE MASSIVE EXPENDITURE ON DEFENCE AND A NEED FOR EVEN LARGER NUMBERS OF OFFENSIVE SYSTEMS. IF THIS ANALYSIS WAS CORRECT, WHAT COULD BE SAID ABOUT THE US OBJECTIVES IN THE GENEVA NEGOTIATIONS?

5. WEINBERGER REPLIED THAT THE ADMINISTRATION'S FIRST OBJECTIVE IN GENEVA WAS TO OBTAIN AGREEMENT TO DEEP REDUCTIONS IN OFFENSIVE SYSTEMS. THE ADMINISTRATION ALSO WISHED TO EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITIES FOR STRENGTHENING DETERRENCE BY PLACING GREATER RELIANCE ON DEFENCE. THEY WERE PREPARED TO DISCUSS SOVIET CONCERNS ABOUT SPACE-BASED SYSTEMS. THE ADMINISTRATION ALSO WANTED A GOOD AGREEMENT ON INF. IN THE MEANTIME, IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN AND MODERNISE THE OFFENSIVE NUCLEAR ARSENAL AND TO CONTINUE WITH THE SDI RESEARCH PROGRAMME. THIS WAS BECAUSE THE REGIME ESTABLISHED BY THE ABM TREATY HAD NOT WORKED IN TWO RESPECTS. IN THE FIRST PLACE, EXPECTED REDUCTIONS IN OFFENSIVE SYSTEMS HAD NOT BEEN ACHIEVED: SOVIET REFUSAL TO MAKE SUCH REDUCTIONS HAD BEEN THE HISTORY OF THE LAST 15 YEARS. IN THE SECOND PLACE, THE RUSSIANS HAD MAINTAINED A KEEN INTEREST IN DEFENSIVE SYSTEMS AND HAD CARRIED OUT EXTENSIVE RESEARCH IN THIS AREA. THEY HAD ALSO ENGAGED IN ACTIVITIES WHICH VIOLATED THE ABM TREATY AND HAD CREATED, FOR THE US, THE PROBLEM OF A POSSIBLE SOVIET BREAKOUT CAPABILITY. PERLE SAID THAT THE BASIC BARGAIN STRUCK IN 1972 HAD PRE-SUPPOSED THE ABSENCE OF A SOVIET CAPABILITY TO HOLD AT RISK US RETALIATORY NUCLEAR FORCES. IN EXCHANGE FOR THIS, THE US HAD AGREED NOT TO DEVELOP ABM DEFENCES. BUT THE RUSSIANS NOW HAD THE CAPABILITY TO OVERWHELM US STRATEGIC FORCES AND HAD ALSO PROCEEDED WITH DEFENSIVE DEVELOPMENTS. PERLE NOTED THAT GROMYKO HAD TOLD SHULTZ IN GENEVA ON 7-8 JANUARY THAT THE RUSSIANS AGREED THAT THERE COULD BE NO LIMITS ON RESEARCH INTO DEFENSIVE SYSTEMS.

/6. MR

6. MR HESELTINE SAID THAT, IF ONE ENVISAGED A SITUATION IN WHICH STRATEGIC NUCLEAR SYSTEMS WERE NEUTRALISED, THE IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES COULD WELL INCLUDE AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN EUROPE AND A NEW THREAT CAUSED BY THE SOVIET ADVANTAGE IN CONVENTIONAL SYSTEMS. THIS WOULD BE A VERY UNDESIRABLE SITUATION. GIVEN THAT IT WAS MOST UNLIKELY THAT A BALANCE OF CONVENTIONAL FORCES IN EUROPE WOULD EVER BE AGREED TO BY THE RUSSIANS, IT WAS MOST UNLIKELY THAT IT WOULD BE DESIRABLE FOR THE US AND THE SOVIET UNION TO SET IN PLACE DEFENCES AGAINST STRATEGIC NUCLEAR SYSTEMS. IT THEREFORE AGAIN BECAME HARD TO UNDERSTAND AND EXPLAIN WHAT THE US NEGOTIATING OBJECTIVES IN GENEVA MIGHT BE. WEINBERGER REPLIED THAT HE THOUGHT THERE WERE REAL INCENTIVES FOR THE RUSSIANS TO AGREE IN GENEVA TO REDUCTIONS IN OFFENSIVE SYSTEMS. ARMS EXPENDITURE WAS A HEAVY BURDEN ON THE SOVIET ECONOMY. THE RUSSIANS WOULD BE INTERESTED IN OBTAINING AT GENEVA A MILITARILY AND POLITICALLY SECURE WAY OF SPENDING LESS ON DEFENCE. GENERAL VESSEY COMMENTED THAT IT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO CAUSE THE RUSSIANS TO DEVOTE DEFENCE RESOURCES TO STRATEGIC DEFENCE SO THAT THEIR ABILITY TO DEVOTE RESOURCES TO CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS WAS REDUCED.

7. MR HESELTINE NOTED THAT THE WHOLE ISSUE OF THE SDI AND ITS IMPACT ON THE GENEVA NEGOTIATIONS SEEMED LIKELY TO CREATE SEVERE TRANS-ATLANTIC STRAINS IN THE COMING MONTHS AND YEARS. IT WOULD BE IMPORTANT FOR THE UK AND THE US TO REMAIN IN THE CLOSEST TOUCH ABOUT ALL THE DIFFICULT ISSUES INVOLVED. WEINBERGER ASCCEPTED THIS AND NOTED THE CONSIDERABLE EFFORTS NOW BEING MADE BY THE ADMINISTRATION TO EXPLAIN THE SDI IN EUROPE AND THE COMPLETELY NEW STRATEGIC THINKING IT IMPLIED.

WRIGHT