

Prime Minister

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This letter says:

(a) that justifying the SDI by Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
reference to Soviet mobile  
MIRVs is not a very London SW1A 2AH  
good argument and contradicts earlier  
US statements.

9 December 1985

(b) that the complete ban on mobile MIRVs proposed  
by the US could weaken their deterrent; and  
(c) we had better find out pretty quickly what  
Dear Charles, they are up to.

I agree with (a) which  
you have already  
said to the

Mr McFarlane's Briefing to the Prime Minister  
23 November : SDI

Americans:  
but I  
don't think  
they are so  
naive or  
blind to

Thank you for your letter of 24 November about  
Mr McFarlane's briefing at Chequers on 24 November. The Foreign  
Secretary has asked me to draw your attention to one element of  
the briefing which he found of particular interest.

In reporting on the Geneva discussions on deterrence,  
Mr McFarlane stated that the point of greatest concern to the US  
was the Soviet introduction of mobile mirrored systems. He then  
reported that the President had justified the SDI to Mr Gorbachev  
in terms of three basic reasons:

their own  
interests as  
(b) suggests.  
We must  
refrain from  
teaching  
grandmother to

- (i) the need to counter Soviet development of mobile mirrored systems, which would force the US to move to strategic defence unless agreed and verifiable reductions in them could be achieved;
- (ii) the need to provide against the impressive Soviet research programme into BMD; and
- (iii) the need to take account of the possible proliferation of third country systems.

tuck eggs.  
CDP  
9/12.

Of these reasons, the second - the argument for a prudent hedge - is of course familiar, and a major element in the Government's support for the US research programme. Arguably, the Gorbachev offer to throw open Soviet laboratories to inspection if an agreement to ban research is reached could resolve this problem. But it seems unlikely that the Russians will follow through on this offer in a way the West will find acceptable.

The third reason - protection against third party systems - carries certain implications for ourselves, should the Soviet Union decide to invoke such a justification for its own activity. This third argument was the one advanced by President Nixon at the time of the signature of the ABM Treaty, in order to justify US limited deployments of BMD and continued research. In that context, President Nixon referred to the threat from China. Since then, the possibility of threats from other third parties over the longer term has perhaps become more real. Nonetheless, the question still arises whether, on this justification alone, the balance of overall advantage favours the acceleration of strategic defence research programmes on both sides.

/ The most





The most interesting point, however, is Mr McFarlane's citation of the threat from Soviet mobile mirrored systems as a prime justification for the SDI. You will be aware, from earlier discussions with senior US officials and with the President himself, that this argument appears to have emerged rather recently on the US side, and to have had a particular attraction for Mr McFarlane himself. At the Camp David talks last year, at the Prime Minister's debriefing after the January meeting, in her discussions with the President in Bonn and with Mr Shultz in London in June, and in her talks with Mr Weinberger in Washington in July, no reference was made to the mobile mirrored threat as integrally linked to the need to pursue the SDI. Nor has this argument been advanced at lower levels.

The case for such a justification appears to have been put to us by Mr McFarlane in his private discussion with the Prime Minister on 28 September, when he briefed her on the President's talks with Mr Shevardnadze in Washington earlier that week. At that time, Mr McFarlane stated that the President had emphasised the threat in the US perception of the new Soviet offensive systems, "above all through the decision to introduce mobile mirvs". The US, for public opinion reasons, could not match the Soviet Union in building new offensive systems, and had therefore been forced back on strategic defence. At the time, the Prime Minister commented that this was a new and not a very good argument for the SDI. If the Russians offered not to introduce mobile mirvs, the United States, she continued, would have no justification for proceeding with the SDI. In the view of the Foreign Secretary, the Prime Minister's comment in September remains valid in the aftermath of the Geneva Summit. This is particularly the case now that the Americans themselves have called, as part of their latest detailed proposals in the Geneva negotiations, for a total ban on all mobile ICBMs, whether mirrored or not.

Mr McFarlane's argument should also be examined against the background of the development of US strategic thinking over the past few years. During the 1970s, US Administrations favoured a mobile mirrored ICBM of their own (the MX). The project foundered on Congressional doubts about the proposed basing mode, and the overall need for this type of ICBM. The President established in 1982 a Commission on Strategic Forces, chaired by General Scowcroft, to review the options. The Commission's Report noted that "a more stable structure of ICBM deployments would exist if both sides moved towards more survivable methods of basing ... the need to keep open the option for different types of mobile basing suggests a missile of small size ... deployment of a small single warhead ICBM in hardened mobile launchers is of particular interest because it could permit deployment in peacetime in limited areas such as military reservations."

/ The President





The President endorsed the Report, which was interpreted (notably in Congress) as approval for the concept of a new, single-warhead, mobile land-based system. However, the Commission also proposed basing the MX in fixed silos. This was endorsed by the President, and accepted by Congress. In other words, mobile (but not mirrored mobile) systems were approved in principle, while the deployment of the non-mobile MX was endorsed as a stop-gap measure. These steps all followed the release of the Commission's Report in April 1983, one month after the President had launched the SDI. At that time, therefore, the US view appears to have supported both mobile systems and the development of strategic defences.

Mr McFarlane's recent statements (echoed by Mr Richard Perle in recent testimony to the Senate) appear to rest on the premise that the US will not, because of domestic opposition, be able to deploy any mobile systems; but that the Russians will, in a manner the US (despite their success in verifying accurately the number of mobile SS20s) not be able to verify. The mirroring of mobile ICBMs adds an extra danger. It is worth noting that of the two mobile Soviet ICBMs, only the SS24 is mirrored; the SS25 (of which the US complain in the context of contraventions of the SALT II constraints) is at present a single warhead mobile system of the type endorsed by the Scowcroft Commission.

The US proposal to ban all mobile systems has a wider significance. If it were accepted by the Russians (which is unlikely), it could have the effect of removing the ICBM leg from the US strategic triad, since the growing vulnerability of fixed silos to counter-force attack would make their further deployment increasingly difficult to justify. This in turn could damage the effectiveness of the US deterrent force, by removing the main advantages associated with land-based missiles (speed of delivery, high accuracy, and swift and dependable communications). At the same time, the threat to sea-based forces could increase, especially if the overall levels of warheads were reduced as a result of the Geneva talks. Fewer SLBMs would mean fewer submarine platforms, thus increasing the attractiveness to the Soviet Union of finding a solution to the ASW problem, and perhaps the chances of their doing so.

Given Mr McFarlane's argument in the SDI context about the mobile mirrored threat, the potential relevance of this to the new US proposal at Geneva that all mobile ICBMs should be banned, and the wider strategic importance of the above points, the Foreign Secretary believes that we should take the opportunity to explore with the US their current thinking on both elements.

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S E C R E T



I am sending copies of this letter to Richard Mottram (MOD) and to Michael Stark (Cabinet Office)

*Yours,*

*Le Appleyard*  
(L V Appleyard)  
Private Secretary

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