MO2BH2

File

cc FCO
MOD
CO.

# 10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

6 November 1985

**NUCLEAR DIALOGUE WITH THE SOVIET UNION**

Thank you for your letter of 4 November enclosing a draft reply from the Prime Minister to Mr Gorbachev's letter of 24 October.

The Prime Minister has approved a slightly amended version of the reply which I enclose. I should be grateful if it could be despatched.

I do not think The Prime Minister would object to the Foreign Secretary mentioning our reply in the Foreign Affairs Day of the Debate on the Address.

I am sending copies of this letter and its enclosure to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence) and Michael Stark (Cabinet Office).

Charles Powell

Len Appleyard Esq
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

JB.

Prime Minister
The drafting of the Soviet message is obscure and I am not sure it sustains the interpretation we put on it.
On the other hand, there is a lot to be said for defending our interests by talking to the Russians rather than by refusing to talk to them.
Agree proposed reply?
CDP 5/xi

CONFIDENTIAL

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

4 November 1985

Dear Charles,

Nuclear Dialogue with the Soviet Union

I enclose a draft reply from the Prime Minister to the letter from Mr Gorbachev delivered by the Soviet Charge on 24 October. It has been agreed between the Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary.

The Soviet argument, which has some public appeal, is that, since British and French forces cannot be taken into account in the US/Soviet negotiations but are a part of the overall Western force structure with which the Soviet Union is faced, they should at least be considered in separate and parallel exchanges between the Russians and the French and ourselves.

On the substance there is every reason to maintain our established preconditions for reconsidering our position (ie deep cuts in Soviet and American systems and no changes in Soviet missile defence), and for not becoming involved in negotiations about them;

a) Although Mr Gorbachev says that he is not seeking to reduce British nuclear forces, we must avoid giving him an opening to bring pressure over the size of our forces and, more particularly, over plans for their modernisation. The Soviet Union has room for manoeuvre. Until our preconditions are met, we, with a minimum deterrent force, have none.

b) A major Soviet objective remains to establish a 'euro-strategic balance' by equating the SS20s with British and French strategic weapons; thereby removing US GLCMs (and probably Pershing 2s) from Europe; and giving them the opportunity to split the Europeans from the United States and to divide them among themselves. Dialogue with Britain could be exploited to legitimise their approach and to try to increase trans-Atlantic differences.

c) There would be pressures for Britain to "contribute" to the success of arms control, whether the US/Soviet negotiations were going well, or faltering. The idea of "compensation" to the Russians for our present, and in particular for our future forces, would easily catch on. It might even be attractive to the Americans themselves in some circumstances.

/Some

CONFIDENTIAL

DEFENCE: Arms Control - SALT - Pt 7

We should remember, however, that most, if not all of these problems and pressures are ones we shall have to face anyway in the not too distant future, if the US/Soviet arms control process makes progress. Others are likely to develop as Trident modernisation proceeds. We can counter the fear that they may be exploited by the Russians by keeping in very close touch with the principal allies involved, and by managing the dialogue so as to give the Russians no basis on which to use it to try to influence our nuclear policies or divide us from our allies. The terms of the draft reply are designed to do this.

Even so a simpler way of meeting the main dangers in paragraph 3 above might be by following M. Mitterrand's lead in rejecting the idea of negotiations on the narrow grounds that we had no margin for manoeuvre, and that negotiation would therefore have no point - although we did not reject the idea of an exchange of views on arms control issues.

We believe that there are strong political arguments against such a flatly negative response, especially at a time when Mr Gorbachev is securing propaganda advantage, if a positive one that avoids the dangers is open to us. To refuse to talk would sit uncomfortably with the Government's proclaimed policy in favour of dialogue, especially on a subject so sensitive with public opinion as arms control, where both the Americans and French have been more visibly involved recently. There would be some benefit to us in restoring our relations with the Soviet Union after the expulsions.

why?

The Foreign and Defence Secretaries conclude that, whilst firmly ruling out negotiation covering Britain's nuclear deterrent, we should say yes to the offer of dialogue. The main channel for the dialogue should be that with Mr Shevardnadze. A positive reply on this might help to elicit a firm date for his visit.

Soundings of the Americans indicate that, so long as they are warned in advance, the Administration would not be embarrassed by a "yes but" reply from the Prime Minister to Mr Gorbachev. Given the American record in consultation over recent weeks we should certainly let them know in advance the substance of the Prime Minister's intended reply - though in ways which minimise any risk of a leak from Washington. Although there is no strict obligation to do the same with the French, we have a strong interest in all this in not giving the Soviet Union further advantage by enabling them to try to exploit significantly different responses from us and the French. There is thus a strong case for forewarning them too.

/The

The Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary see advantage in despatching (through our Ambassador in Moscow) and announcing the response before the US Summit. An announcement can follow rapidly after delivery of the letter; the Prime Minister will recall that the offer of a dialogue with Britain was made in public in Paris on 4 October, 10 days before she received Mr Gorbachev's letter. Announcement of the broad contents of the reply to Mr Gorbachev in the Foreign Affairs Day of the debate on the address (8 November) would be a suitable occasion, but public holidays in Moscow on 6, 7 and 8 November may make this difficult to achieve.

The Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary would of course be happy todiscuss the draft reply with the Prime Minister if she would find this useful.

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

Yours ever,

Len Appleyard

(L V Appleyard)
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq
PS/10 Downing Street