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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

4 February 1986

Prime Minister

You will want to  
hear what Mr. Nitze has  
to say, & tell him  
that your hope to be  
putting some ideas to the  
President soon.

Dear Charles

Call by Mr Nitze on the Prime Minister:  
1630 on 5 February

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SAL I II  
limits.  
CDP 4/2.

The NSC met in Washington on 3 February to consider the proposals which Gorbachev made in Moscow on 15 January and which he put to Western Heads of Government in messages sent the same day. The NSC doubtless also considered how President Reagan might respond. We so far have no information about its conclusions, save that it was decided that Mr Nitze should visit the main European capitals, starting in London and finishing with a meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels on 12 February.

The initial American reaction to the Soviet proposals of 15 January indicates that they regard these first and foremost as a propaganda move and that their general assessment is compatible with ours, as set out in Len Appleyard's letter of 24 January (further copy enclosed).

There are some general points about the response to Gorbachev which might usefully be put to Nitze:

- (a) The Alliance needs to counter Gorbachev's attempt to seize the propaganda initiative by hijacking President Reagan's vision of a nuclear-free world and fitting it into the three-phase, 15 year timetable. Responses will need to underline the West's seriousness in the search for a more stable peace and real progress over disarmament. But it will also be necessary to bear in mind the European view of the importance of retaining the well-tried strategy of nuclear deterrence until and unless we have a better one to put in its place.
- (b) While there is little new in the Gorbachev proposals, beyond the largely propaganda elements of a timetable for complete nuclear disarmament, the new flexibility over presentation may give negotiating possibilities which should not be neglected. In particular, the shift of tactics over verification and over "compensation" for UK/French forces should be probed.
- (c) What Gorbachev said on verification was ambiguous. He may merely have been countering what is clearly one of the strongest cards in the Western hand. But his support

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/ for verification and reference to on-site inspection should be taken up and exploited. A particular effort should be made over the CW negotiations. I enclose a copy of the Foreign Secretary's letter of 13 January to Mr Shultz which shows the line we have been pressing on the Americans and which the Prime Minister may wish to advocate to Mr Nitze.

- (d) The Gorbachev proposals relegated conventional arms control to a small part of the end of a long message about nuclear disarmament. His scheme would ensure Soviet military superiority at each stage, including the final one, when the Soviet side would presumably be left with its overwhelming conventional superiority in Europe. The Russians must be reminded of the importance which the Alliance attaches to correcting the conventional imbalance.
- (e) On British and French nuclear weapons and INF the Russians are maintaining two positions at Geneva: a zero-zero solution in Europe, and a separate interim agreement (as mentioned in the joint statement at the Geneva Summit). But they clearly favour the first. You will have seen the report of the consultations with the US negotiators in the NAC on 3 February (a copy of UKDel NATO telno 35 is enclosed). The scope for the Soviet Union to attempt to inhibit British and French modernisation is maintained, as is the scope for continuing to present our forces as the "stumbling block" in Geneva. None the less, it was unexpected that the Russians should give up a presentationally favourable position on third country systems which attracted considerable support in a number of Western countries. It is too early to judge whether this might indicate that if an agreement on strategic systems, together with an understanding on the permissible limits of research on defensive weapons, can be reached the Russians might be prepared to accept a face-saving formula on third country forces. Nitze's views on this would be of interest. Meanwhile, the Russians should be pressed on the contradiction of maintaining two separate and inconsistent INF proposals.

Over the years, Nitze has toyed with ideas for involving UK and French systems, for example by indicating more precisely to the Soviet Union how they would be dealt with in START II. In December last year he gave Shultz (for floating in London) a formula under which the Russians would be told that British and French forces would become involved in negotiations following a superpower agreement to reduce their arsenals to 4500 warheads on each side. The US were firmly told that we had publicly stated our two conditions and were not prepared to say more in advance of very substantial US and Soviet reductions being agreed and implemented. The Nitze line constituted a slippery slope on which we (and the French) were not prepared to embark.

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So long as the points referred to above are taken into account by the US Administration and their proposed response to Gorbachev seems politically well judged, we have no particular drafting suggestions to press on Mr Nitze. The key will be to ensure that the American response is presentationally good; that it does not include unacceptable statements on the abolition of nuclear weapons and throwing over deterrence; and that European preoccupations are not overlooked. This last point will mean giving due prominence to INF and stressing that unconventional arms reductions to correct the conventional imbalance in Europe are of major importance.

The Prime Minister may wish to take the opportunity to put to Nitze the case for the US abiding by the limits established by SALT I and the unratified SALT II agreements, despite accusations of Soviet violations. The President is considering Department of Defence recommendations for "proportionate responses" which reportedly involve exceeding limits on missile numbers and increasing encryption on US tests. Other Washington agencies take a variety of views; the State Department and Joint Chiefs of Staff generally oppose exceeding SALT limits but advocate, for example, pressing on with MX deployment instead. So long as essential security interests are not compromised (and the Soviet capability for rapid break-out is probably superior to the American) the political case for the West remaining scrupulous is very strong. When the problem last arose, in June 1985, NATO advice was unanimous in this sense and any US decision to exceed the limit would undoubtedly damage the Alliance. As you know, the Prime Minister herself played a key role in 1985 in convincing the President that he should stick to observance of the SALT limits.

The Foreign Secretary is to see Mr Nitze at 0915 on 6 February. It would be very helpful to have before then some account of the talk with the Prime Minister.

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram in the MOD and Michael Start in the Cabinet Office.

*Yours ever,  
Colin Budd*

(C R Budd).....  
Private Secretary

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