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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

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CDP 192.

Dear Charles,

SDI and US Strategy at Geneva: Message to President Reagan

Thank you for your letter of 6 February, enclosing a revised draft message from the Prime Minister. The Foreign Secretary is in general happy with this, which closely reflects his own thinking. He has however suggested certain revisions which are incorporated in the enclosed re-draft; the new elements are underlined.

Apart from minor amendments for the purpose of clarification, the main changes apply in three areas: the position of UK and French forces; the Gorbachev zero-zero INF proposal; and his likely attitude to an agreement during the life-time of the present US Administration.

On the first two points, the Foreign Secretary proposes amendments to take account of the points which are covered in his proposed draft letter to Mr Shultz, on which I have written to you separately. On the last point, Sir Geoffrey Howe recognises the tactical advantage in warning the President of the possibility that Gorbachev will not in fact want to do a deal during the former's term of office. On the other hand, he sees a risk of thus weakening the argument later in the message for steps which some in Washington will see as substantive concessions; and of strengthening the hand of those who are basically opposed to any agreement. On balance, therefore, he would prefer to tone down the assessment of Gorbachev's attitude in the terms suggested. This would bring the assessment more into line with the views the Prime Minister sent the President last September.

The Foreign Secretary has noted that the Prime Minister may wish to add something about the relationship between strategic defence and the elimination of nuclear weapons. I should record the Foreign Secretary's strong conviction that we must continue to avoid giving the impression that we see a nuclear-free world as realistic or desirable, either as an objective in itself or as part of the rationale for the SDI.

Finally, you suggest that it may be better to handle the draft paper separately from the message. The Foreign Secretary

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agrees, and will send the paper direct to Shultz under cover of the letter on points arising from the Nitze talks here.

Yours ever,

Len Appleyard

(L V Appleyard)
Private Secretary

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DRAFT MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO PRESIDENT
REAGAN ON ARMS CONTROL

When George Shultz was here in December he suggested that I might let you have some thoughts on the handling of arms control issues at your next meeting with Mr Gorbachev. At this early stage, I should like to put to you some general reflections. Nearer the time of the meeting I might - if you thought it useful - put forward some more specific ideas.

The starting point has to be how we assess Gorbachev's intentions. We have both had lengthy meetings with him. He is clearly a more astute operator than his predecessors, far more aware of the scope for playing on public opinion in the West. But under the veneer is the same brand of dedicated Soviet Communist that we have known in the past, relentless in pursuing Soviet interests and prepared to take his time over this. His main, indeed overriding, purpose will be to stop you from developing the SDI, both because he thinks it will give the United States a unilateral advantage and because he would much prefer to avoid the strain on the Soviet economy which having to match it or counter it will impose (though he will accept this if necessary). He will also try to use the issue to split the Alliance.

My judgement is that Gorbachev does not want a return to the pre-Geneva situation of no negotiation with the United States, because he realises that this would actually reduce the Soviet Union's ability to exploit Western opinion. I still believe that, as I told you last year,

there is a chance that he wants to go further and conclude an agreement. Nonetheless, knowing at first hand the strength of your commitment to pursuing SDI research, recently reaffirmed in your State of the Union message, there is a risk that he will be tempted to dismiss the chances of an agreement on terms which he would find acceptable being attainable in the short term. Unless he can see some prospect of an equitable deal, he may, therefore, not come to your next Summit looking for definitive agreements on the main arms control issues, though he may be ready for a separate or interim agreement on INF. Rather he may calculate that the process of talking serves him better than any agreement likely to be on offer.

Should he so decide, his purpose then would be to spin out negotiations in the hope of being able to rely on a steadily mounting volume of pressure from Western public opinion to remove the "blockage" represented by the SDI, to give time for possible budget pressures to make your choices more difficult, and possibly to try to play the issue into the next United States Presidential elections. In other words, the danger exists that he may conclude that his best hope of limiting or restricting SDI lies in sitting you out. Such a conclusion would not be in our interests.

We also need to consider the wider context within which your negotiations will be taking place. When you launched the SDI, you set out the noble vision of a world without nuclear weapons. Gorbachev - and I think this is a good indicator of his shrewdness - has latched on to this and produced his spurious timetable of simple steps for achieving the goal by the end of the century. We both realise that for the

most part his proposals are propaganda, although no less dangerous for that. In the real world, it's not going to happen like that.

Where it seems to me that Gorbachev's proposals are particularly dangerous is in the creation of unrealistic public expectations. The search for a world without nuclear weapons holds far more problems for the West than for the Soviet Union. Such a world would be a very risky place indeed unless there were concurrent steps to reduce the massive imbalance in the Soviet Union's favour in conventional forces. In particular, Western Europe would be very much more vulnerable. There are the risks of further nuclear proliferation in the next few years, and we have to recognise that, while nuclear weapons themselves might in theory be abolished, the knowledge of how to make them never will be. But the risk lies above all in undermining public support for our agreed strategy of deterrence and flexible response. This remains the key to our immediate security; and in the face of the dangerous simplifications of Gorbachev's propaganda we need to reaffirm our determination to seek enhanced stability at lower levels of forces, conventional as well as nuclear.

Against this background, the crucial choice which you have to make is how to deal with Soviet insistence that there can be no serious progress towards reductions in strategic nuclear weapons unless you abandon the SDI. Of course, I do not advocate a string of unrequited concessions. Gorbachev must be continually pressed to negotiate seriously. But if he shows signs of doing so, we must for our part be properly prepared to respond, as I know you are.

We are agreed that SDI must be pursued. But there remains the need to meet genuine Soviet anxieties as well as Soviet propaganda and to show that we continue to seek a stable international environment.

One option is to decline to expand current US statements on the SDI, its relationship with the ABM Treaty, and your intentions for future developments beyond those which you have already made and which were incorporated in the Camp David Four Points. You would continue to offer the Soviet Union a dialogue on moving from reliance on offensive nuclear weapons to greater dependence on strategic defence. You would no doubt keep open your offer to share the technology with the Soviet Union, though personally I do not think this offer will ever carry much conviction in Soviet eyes. The risk of this approach is that it would be relatively easy for the Soviet Union to build a case that it was the United States who was obstructing progress towards reductions in offensive nuclear weapons. This in turn would lead to steadily mounting pressures in Europe at least upon the United States to modify its position, pressures that would not help us to achieve the right result you and I seek.

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Another option is one which I mentioned in the note which I left with you in New York at the end of October last year. In effect you would offer the Soviet Union a greater sense of reassurance about the likely shape, scope and timescale of possible development of the SDI. You would propose a framework which would allow reductions in offensive weapons to take place over a measured period against a forecast of future defensive developments. Because of the inherent

difficulty of predicting what those defensive developments will be, the constraints on them would be expressed in terms of what the United States and the Soviet Union would not do by a certain date rather than by what it would do. As I suggested at the time it could be achieved by a mixture of strengthening and further refining the ABM Treaty, extending the period of notice required for unilateral withdrawal from it and a commitment not to enter particular phases of defensive programmes before certain specified dates.

I continue to believe that this second option offers the most promising prospect. It emphatically does not make the SDI as such negotiable. It would not restrict research which we both know to be essential and on which constraints anyway cannot be verified. There would be no Soviet veto. But the Russians would have reassurance against a sudden and unforeseen "break-out" in this area. I also believe that a position on these lines would command wide public understanding in the West. I should very much like to know whether you see merit in it.

There are a number of other points relevant to your meeting with Gorbachev which I shall mention only briefly at this stage.

One is the importance of exposing and challenging the more dangerous elements in the recent Gorbachev proposals. I am particularly concerned about the proposed restrictions which would affect the United Kingdom and France: a freeze on third country nuclear systems and a ban on transfer of strategic and medium range missiles.

These would be seriously damaging to our national and to Alliance security and must be rejected. I was very glad to hear from Paul Nitze that you had identified these points as major objections to the Gorbachev proposals. But I also have considerable misgivings about giving him any encouragement now to believe that our forces could later be brought into the process on any but the conditions we have specified ourselves. I trust that you will be able in your reply to avoid raising his expectations on that score.

A second point is the need to persuade Gorbachev to negotiate seriously in other arms control fields. As you know I am particularly concerned about chemical weapons where it seems to me that the Alliance is at the great disadvantage of having no credible response to a chemical attack other than nuclear retaliation. I hope that we can work closely together to overcome remaining differences on verification in the draft Treaty tabled by George Bush in 1984, so that we can have a strong and united Alliance negotiating position. The recent Western initiative also opens the prospect of making some progress on MBFR.

Thirdly there is the question of Treaty compliance. As you know I regarded your decision last June to continue to adhere to SAL^T restraints as an important act of statesmanship. I hope that you will feel able to maintain that position which earned the United States enormous respect. Continued restraint will also be important in building public support for the US negotiating position in Geneva.

It was good of you to send Paul Nitze to brief me on your latest thinking. While I fully support the general approach of your proposed reply to Gorbachev's proposals, I have - as Paul Nitze will have told you - anxieties about your ideas on INF. The zero-zero approach is of course consistent with our previous public statements but it still presents problems of consistency with the decision to deploy Pershing II and Cruise missiles as an essential part of the Alliance's spectrum of nuclear deterrence. My own preference would still be for the sort of interim agreement you proposed last November, but I recognise that you will have to consider this in the light of a number of other factors. Geoffrey Howe will let George Shultz have a more detailed note amplifying this and other points, and I hope that our experts can stay closely in touch on this as well as on the wider issues.

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