

NOTE FOR PRESS OFFICERS

SALT II CONSTRAINTS

Background

1. President Reagan will announce at 2100 BST today (27 May) the following decisions in connection with the launching of the USS Nevada:

In view of present circumstances, including current military and economic realities, two older Poseidon submarines will be retired and dismantled, rather than refurbished when the eighth Trident submarine, USS Nevada begins sea trials later this month.

- The most essential near-term response to Soviet non-compliance remains the implementation of a full US strategic modernization program, to underwrite deterrence today, and the continued pursuit of the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) research program to see if it is possible to provide a safer and more stable basis for the future security of the United States and its Allies.

- a study of the best options for a comprehensive program to restore both the survivability and effectiveness of US ICBMs. This will include full deployment of the Peacekeeper, and will also look forward toward additional U.S. ICBM requirements, including the small ICBM, to complement the Peacekeeper.

- In the future, the United States will base its decisions regarding its strategic forces structure on the nature and magnitude of the threat posed by Soviet strategic forces, and not on standards contained in a flawed treaty which was never ratified, which would have expired if it had been ratified, and which has been seriously violated by the Soviet Union.

- Since the United States will retire and dismantle two Poseidon submarines this summer, they will remain technically in observance of the terms of the SALT II Treaty until the US equips its 131st B-52 heavy bombers for cruise missile carriage near the end of this year.

At that time to continue deployment of the US B-52 heavy bombers with cruise missiles beyond the 131st aircraft without dismantling additional US systems as compensation under the terms of SALT II in response to Soviet violations. Should the Soviet Union use this time to take the constructive steps necessary to alter the current situation, the US will certainly take this into account.

Line to Take:

2. The Government has frequently made clear its belief in the importance of the strict observance of arms control agreements by all parties. We have drawn to the attention of the Soviet Union on a number of occasions the need to comply strictly with such agreements and to be seen to do so. We have done this most recently in the message from the Prime Minister to Mr Gorbachev which Lord Whitelaw has taken to Moscow.
3. The Government welcomes President Reagan's decision to continue to respect for the time being the constraints of the unratified SALT agreement by dismantling two Poseidon submarines.
4. The President's statement on 27 May makes it clear that if the Soviet Union takes constructive steps between now and the end of the year to alter the current situation, the President will take this into account in reviewing whether the US should itself exceed SALT II limits. Thus the door has been left open, and there is a clear opportunity for the Soviet Union to respond positively.
5. We trust therefore that it will be possible for the US itself to avoid exceeding the SALT II limits at the end of this year. This would leave the way open for real progress to be made in arms control, as envisaged by both leaders at Geneva last year. We would much regret it if the provisional decision by the President to exceed the limits had to be implemented.