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23 October 1986

From the Private Secretary

ARMS CONTROL: UK/US EXCHANGES

Thank you for your letter of 22 October enclosing draft instructions to HM Ambassador, Washington dealing with arms control negotiations in the aftermath of the Reykjavik Summit. The Prime Minister would like certain changes made to these and I enclose an amended version with which she is content. You will note that the Prime Minister does not think that we should overload the circuit at this stage by reiterating our previous message about the United States' breakout from the SALT II limits. This has been omitted from the message.

I am sending copies of this letter and enclosure to John Howe (Ministry of Defence) and Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

(C.D. POWELL)

C.R. Budd, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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DRAFT INSTRUCTIONS TO HM AMBASSADOR, WASHINGTON

UK/US EXCHANGES POST REYKJAVIK ON ARMS CONTROL

1. The coming weeks will be crucial in arms control. The Prime Minister will wish to use her visit next month to Washington to chart the course for Alliance strategy post-Reykjavik. She wishes the US Administration and the President to be left in no doubt about our own views, our priorities, and in some cases our concerns. In order to set the scene for her visit, and following your useful (but in some respects disturbing) discussion with Shultz last week (your telno 2667), you should therefore arrange to speak as soon as possible to Shultz, Weinberger and Poindexter, drawing on the points below as soon as possible. (Mr. Alexander should also make these points as appropriate during his own calls in Washington next week). In addition, it would be helpful to have an early account of the current thinking of senior US military, and of key figures in Congress.

2. The new (underlined) proposal for the total elimination of all strategic ballistic missiles within the very limited timespan of ten years causes the Prime Minister considerable concern. The President's March 1983 speech acknowledged that the effort to eliminate all ballistic missiles via SDI would take quote years, probably decades unquote. It is unclear to us why and how the timescale has been so dramatically accelerated. But for the following reasons she believes that the merits of such a proposal are open to very considerable doubt.

3. It is her view and that of her colleagues that nuclear weapons cannot be treated in isolation, without taking account of the overall balance of forces between East and West. The total elimination of strategic ballistic missiles would gravely undermine NATO strategy, and would leave Europe exposed to the greatly superior conventional forces of the Soviet Union. This conventional imbalance has been clearly

demonstrated in a range of solid and authoritative US and Allied assessments over the years (cf. the Soviet Military Power documents published by the Pentagon). It cannot be brushed aside now as some Opposition parties in Europe are trying to do. Residual nuclear forces (aircraft, cruise missiles etc.) would not, in our view, carry a credible guarantee of deterrence. The current confidence of Western Europe in its security would therefore be gravely threatened.

4. We are also deeply concerned about the political effect upon our own deterrent. Those in the UK who oppose Alliance strategy will argue that UK Trident is not worth pursuing any longer because it will be undeployable semi-colon and that the case for devoting the money saved to conventional forces is that much stronger with the new importance of a balance in that area. We have heard the view expressed privately by some in the US that we must adjust our approach to accommodate the prospect of all ballistic missiles being eliminated. We do not accept that must be the case. On the contrary, we have grave doubts about Gorbachev's sincerity in backing such an aim, given the importance which his own ballistic missile force represents to the Soviet Union, in both political and strategic terms. It is clear that the French (and Chinese?) have no intention of surrendering theirs. We believe it far more likely therefore that the proposed ten year period will not (not) see the disappearance of all strategic ballistic missiles.

5. But we do fear the political effects in the West in the interim period so long as the debate continues on its new lines. The Soviet Union will use the current concerns within the Alliance to drive wedges between us, to undermine support in the UK for nuclear defence policies and the continued retention of US nuclear bases here, to exploit their own propaganda position, and in the process to do grave damage to the core of Western security.

6. Moreover, the ten-year objective seems wholly dependent on achieving the results in the SDI programme which will

strengthen its claim as a credible insurance policy. It is not clear to us that the ten-year goal will prove to be realistic. We can only judge that in the light of the results over the next few years. But, so long as the US remains committed to the ten-year time scale, grave damage could have been done to Western security in the meantime. Managing the period of continuing SDI research, until such time as decisions can be made one way or another, will be safer and easier if we do not burden ourselves with a dubiously precise target.

7. We would now welcome guidance on how the US propose to proceed at Geneva. We see great advantage in focusing the talks over the next few months on those areas where potential agreement seems both feasible and desirable. In particular, this means the INF talks, where there must be continuing and united Alliance pressure on the Russians not to sustain their re-linkage with SDI. The outline agreement at Reykjavik on nuclear testing should also be exploited to the full. And we continue to see value in pushing the Russians towards a total ban on chemical weapons, and in clearing our minds on conventional arms control.

8. The tentative agreement at Reykjavik on 50 per cent cuts in strategic nuclear weapons over five years should continue to be pursued. But the wholesale elimination of key nuclear weapons would have to be accompanied by the establishment of a balance in conventional forces (which there is no realistic prospect of achieving within levels of expenditure likely to be acceptable). We understand that this key caveat was included (albeit unscripted) in Adelman's UN speech on 20 October (UKDis Geneva in New York telno 83). We very much hope that this is now a basic element in the Administration's position. We also believe that there would need to be very considerable progress in removing the sources of conflict between East and West.

9. On SDI the President can still count upon the Prime Minister's firm support for his research programme, not least

because of Soviet activities in this field. It would be clearly unacceptable for Soviet research to surge ahead while undue constraints were placed on US work.

10. On the details of INF, the Prime Minister earlier this year expressed her anxiety that a zero outcome for Europe would have disadvantages for NATO's deterrence strategy. She recognises now, as she did in her message to the President before Reykjavik, that such an outcome must in the light of previous public statements be accepted by us if the Russians themselves are ready to accept it. However, if the Russians were to insist on higher levels of forces in Asia for themselves, and this resulted in our maintaining some US LRINF deployments in Europe, then that in practice would be a more comfortable outcome for the Alliance. That will be even more the case as levels of strategic forces were reduced, with the prospect of further cuts in the future. We strongly support the US position that an INF agreement should at the outset be coupled with effective collateral constraints over SRINF systems between 1000 kilometres and the range of the SS23. These constraints must be based on the principle, hitherto accepted by the US Administration, that the Soviet level should be frozen and that the US should have either a right to match their levels or a right to deployment at the US 1982 level of 108 in this range bracket. We also need urgently to address the question of how to handle shorter-range systems.

11. Until now, consultation on arms control within the Alliance has been excellent. It would be a matter of great regret if this record were now to be spoilt as we reach the really important stages. (For defensive use) We cannot accept the allegation (eg by Nitze) that we have in any sense been consulted on the US proposal at Reykjavik to eliminate all strategic missiles within a decade. On the contrary, such a proposal is so far as we are aware wholly new.

12. In these new circumstances the Prime Minister believes a substantive discussion within the Alliance is required. She will wish to discuss with the President how to respond to

SECRET

- 5 -

concerns already expressed by a number of NATO partners, and how best to thrash out within the Alliance, at the December Ministerial meeting and thereafter, the crucial issues which the Reykjavik outcome has raised.

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