



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

31 October 1986

Dear Charles,

Arms Control in Europe: The Way Forward

In your letter of 2 October you listed a number of points raised by the Prime Minister about the approach proposed by the Foreign Secretary. As you know she will be chairing a meeting on this subject on 3 November. You may like to have in advance the following comments (prepared jointly with the Ministry of Defence) on the questions listed in your letter.

The proposed initiative is intended to be both presentationally attractive and a serious basis for negotiations. It is designed to rival the scope of the Budapest Appeal. It fulfils the remit of the High Level Task Force established by the NATO Ministerial Meeting in Halifax, which called for "Bold New Steps" in Conventional Arms Control. It seeks to build upon the achievements at MBFR and CDE, instead of escaping from them, as appears to be the Eastern intention, at least as far as MBFR is concerned.

The initiative has been carefully considered by the Chiefs of Staff. Their main conclusions were:

a. The only acceptable interpretation of a 25% reduction in ground and air forces in an Arms Control Zone extending from the Atlantic to the Urals would involve reductions to a common ceiling, with subceilings for air and ground forces in the MBFR Zone (the NATO Guidelines Area) but no separate sub ceilings in the Arms Control Zone. This would involve NATO reductions of 259,500, which with forward defence in mind would need to be made as far as possible from forces remote from the Warsaw Pact borders and Warsaw Pact reductions of 1,462,500. Rigorous confidence building and verification measures would be necessary. Because of the complexities, no specific proposals on armaments reductions should be put forward.

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b. While the proposal for common ceilings on manpower and its negotiation with the Alliance could give grounds for concern there is no inherent reason why, provided that any reductions were satisfactorily apportioned, it should endanger current NATO strategy. The precise implications for the size and shape of British ground and air forces cannot be assessed at this stage.

c. It would be acceptable on security grounds to explore with close allies a British proposal on the lines set out, although it will be necessary to ensure that as negotiations unfold national and Alliance security interests are protected. The Chiefs of Staff would need to be further consulted.

On this basis, the Secretary of State for Defence was fully content for the proposal to be discussed with close Allies, acknowledging at the same time the need to consider a position on armaments, if a workable and potentially negotiable one could be devised.

The idea stemmed originally from our perception of the need for some real substance to be injected into the work ~~set in train in Halifax:~~ both to respond to the Warsaw Pact initiative and to pre-empt other (possibly unwelcome) proposals from other members of the Alliance. Since then, discussions in the NATO Conventional Task Force have not in fact moved to the consideration of practical proposals - ~~much of the~~ focus has been on the difficult procedural question of how to evolve a viable forum for conventional arms control acceptable to both the US and the French. There are as yet no rival proposals on the table, and none in prospect.

On the other hand, the requirement for an initiative in the field of conventional arms control has been much reinforced by the outcome of the Reykjavik Summit. The Prime Minister has herself drawn recent attention to the need when contemplating the prospect of a nuclear-free world to bear in mind the balance of conventional (and chemical) forces, particularly in Europe. If we are to get this message across effectively, we must at some stage set out proposals for dealing with the problem. The approach outlined in the Foreign Secretary's minute of 30 September is designed to do this, in a way which will be geared to the concept of parity between the two military Alliances and which will expose the extent and nature of the disparities which currently exist.

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 Whether the Russians would be prepared to negotiate seriously about the achievement of parity in the conventional field between NATO and the Warsaw Pact in Europe, and whether they will ever be prepared to accept arrangements that would allow force numbers to be effectively monitored and verified is, of course, open to question. But it will be difficult for us to cite the conventional imbalance as an argument against the elimination of nuclear weapons unless we can be seen to have advanced proposals for eliminating this imbalance as well.

Further discussions with our allies will of course be required, particularly on the question of whether, and if so how, equipment should be specifically addressed. Discussions in the NATO Conventional Task Force have not yet progressed far enough to judge what the consensus among our allies is likely to be in this respect: it may be something that will only emerge during East/West negotiations themselves. But it is only in conjunction with our allies that we will be able fully to work out such details. It is not something we can sensibly do on our own.

The Foreign Secretary of course agrees that it will be extremely important at the Vienna CSCE meeting to expose the Soviet Union's shortcomings over human rights. That will be one of our key aims for the early weeks of the meeting, which will focus solely on the issue of implementation. But at some stage in the meeting new proposals will be discussed; and if the West is to make progress on humanitarian issues, we cannot present our ideas on them in isolation from the other aspects of the CSCE process. The East is almost certain at Vienna to draw attention again to its Budapest Appeal and to propose that this be the basis of a new Stockholm-type conference. If we are to counter their ideas, then we must - not least with an eye to public opinion in the UK - have something of our own to put forward.

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I am sending copies of this letter to John Howe, (Ministry of Defence); to the Private Secretaries of the Lord President, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the CDS, and to Michael Stark (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever,

Colin Budd

(C R Budd)
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq
No 10 Downing St

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PREFERENCE (Arms Control) PE 9

