

SUBJECT CC MASTER



cc: Sir P. Cradock

10 DOWNING STREET  
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

3 November 1986

Dear Tony,

ARMS CONTROL IN EUROPE: THE WAY FORWARD

The Prime Minister held a meeting this afternoon to discuss the Foreign Secretary's minute of 30 September, amplified by his letter of 31 October, about the way forward on conventional arms control in Europe and the position which the West should take on this at the CSCE review meeting in Vienna. The Lord President, the Foreign Secretary, the Defence Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Mr. Stanley, Mr. Renton, Sir Robert Armstrong, the Chief of the Defence Staff and Sir Percy Cradock were present.

The Foreign Secretary said that the proposals for conventional arms control set out in his minute were not intended at this stage for public use, but as a contribution to launching discussion within the Alliance. The High Level Task Force set up by the Halifax NATO Ministerial Meeting in May had failed so far to undertake any serious policy work, against the background of continuing disagreement about the right forum for negotiations on conventional arms control. It was important that such negotiations should not begin with Warsaw Pact proposals alone on the table. The case for a western initiative was considerably reinforced by the outcome of the Reykjavik Summit. We needed to get across the message that cuts in strategic nuclear weapons could not go beyond a certain point without parallel negotiations to deal with the imbalance in conventional forces. This task would be eased if we had launched serious discussion of conventional arms control in the Alliance. His proposals were designed to achieve parity between NATO and Warsaw Pact forces in an Arms Control Zone extending from the Atlantic to the Urals, by seeking reductions to a common ceiling. This would need to be backed by vigorous verification measures.

In discussion the importance of re-establishing a strong link between reductions in strategic nuclear weapons and action to deal with the imbalance in conventional forces was recognised. But against the background of the unsatisfactory way in which a time-span for eliminating ballistic missiles

had emerged at the Reykjavik Summit without prior consultation, we should be very careful about putting forward specific figures for reductions in conventional forces. We should not toss proposals onto the table until they had been very carefully analysed and thought out in the Alliance. It was also important to avoid the appearance of a public auction with the Warsaw Pact. This applied with particular force to the concept of a 25% reduction which simply mirrored the Budapest Appeal and could cause confusion in the minds of the public. It was pointed out that the MBFR talks had failed to make any substantial progress, and there was no inherent reason to expect the Soviet Union to be any more ready for serious negotiation in a different forum. We also had to bear in mind the possibility that we might face proposals for increasing the Alliance's spending on conventional forces, to compensate for reductions in nuclear weapons, although financial constraints would make this very difficult.

The Prime Minister concluded that the political sensitivity of negotiations for reductions in conventional forces had greatly increased following the Reykjavik meeting. They needed to be approached with great caution. It would be premature to refer at the CSCE meeting in Vienna to a British initiative or make public reference to specific figures for possible reductions. But if we were to persuade the United States Administration to make the link between proposals for reductions in nuclear weapons and action to redress the conventional balance part of their public position, it would be important for the Alliance to work up considered proposals on conventional force reductions. The Foreign Secretary should therefore discuss his ideas for achieving parity between NATO and Warsaw Pact forces in Europe discreetly with our principal NATO allies, as a contribution to developing an agreed Alliance position. But he should avoid deploying the 25% figure for reductions at this stage.

I am copying this letter to Joan MacNaughton (Lord President's Office), John Howe (Ministry of Defence), Alex Allan (HM Treasury), Andrew Lansley (Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's Office), John Tesh (Ministry of Defence), Peter Westmacott (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Group Captain Donaldson (Chief of the Defence Staff's Office) and Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

*yours sincerely,*  
*Charles Powell*

(CHARLES POWELL)

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office.