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SUBJECT

PRIME MINISTER'S
PERSONAL MESSAGE
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Filed on Soviet Union
contacts with Soviet Ambassador
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TEXT OF MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO MR. GORBACHEV

Thank you for letting me have your thoughts on arms control before my recent visit to the United States. I was glad to see your Ambassador on 13 November and found our meeting useful. I was able to respond immediately through him to some of the points which you raised. On others I have thought it better to wait until after my meeting with President Reagan. It is in the light of that meeting that I am asking Sir Bryan Cartledge to let you know my views on the way forward.

You said in your message that some European leaders seemed to be frightened by the prospect of a Soviet-American understanding. That is certainly not the case. We have full confidence in the United States and its record of consultation with its allies. The doubts we had were about the wisdom of trying to achieve an all-embracing arms control agreement in one leap, as the Soviet Union proposed at Reykjavik. Events convince me that a progressive approach based on smaller, more attainable steps has a better chance. I hope very much that you will revert to that.

At my meeting with President Reagan we identified areas which we thought should be given the highest priority. These were:

- an INF agreement with restraints on shorter range systems;
- a 50% cut over five years in the United States and Soviet strategic offensive systems; and
- a ban on chemical weapons

Effective verification would be absolutely essential to agreements in all three areas. I attach particular importance to action to deal with shorter range systems. As you know, the Soviet Union has far more of those than NATO and they are a threat to almost all of Western Europe including the United

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Kingdom.

I believe that, while progress on all these matters still requires much detailed hard work in negotiations in Geneva, agreements can be reached which are acceptable to the United States, the Soviet Union and to Europe. They would represent a very remarkable achievement. But they also add up to a very substantial agenda, and I do not believe that it makes practical sense at this stage to look beyond them. There is a risk that, by being too ambitious, you will sacrifice what can be achieved now.

There is another point which I must particularly draw to your attention. That is the Soviet Union's decision to re-link the INF negotiations with the SDI research programme. There is no logic in such a link, and I find it a great pity that the Soviet Union has taken a step back on this, thus jeopardising the INF agreement which is an entirely separate matter. I do hope that you will reconsider your decision. Both our peoples need to see that reductions in arms can be achieved.

My talks with President Reagan, and the agreed statement which issued from them, also made clear our view that effective nuclear deterrence will remain essential for our defence. This will not have come as any surprise to you, as I have from the beginning left you in no doubt of my determination to maintain Britain's independent nuclear deterrent and to modernise it with Trident. In the light of developments in Soviet defences, we regard deployment of Trident as offering the minimum effective deterrent force we need. The United States is equally going ahead with the modernisation of its strategic ballistic missile force, including Trident.

I was glad to hear that you agree with me that reductions in chemical weapons and conventional forces are also needed. I am firmly convinced that nuclear weapons cannot be dealt with in isolation. Our defence requires a stable overall balance, and this must mean elimination of the very large disparities in conventional forces, by bringing them down to

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common ceilings. I have been disappointed by the Soviet Union's failure over many years to negotiate seriously on these matters in the MBFR talks in Vienna. This does not increase confidence in the prospects for any wider talks. But NATO will be considering its position on these matters in the coming weeks, and you will find us ready for serious negotiations. As you yourself say, negotiations must take account of the security needs of both sides, and in our case we believe that security in the conventional field in Europe can only be achieved on the basis of parity.

As regards chemical weapons, President Reagan and I agreed at Camp David that a chemical weapons ban should be among our priorities. I therefore welcome your agreement to use the British proposals of July as the basis for discussion. Your acceptance of a stringent verification regime in this area would bring the prospect of an agreed ban closer. Our experts are ready to discuss these matters with yours.

There are two further matters which I should like to mention. The first is the need to make progress towards reducing not just weapons, but the causes of suspicion and of conflict. Two steps which the Soviet Union could take which would help greatly in this respect are first to make an early complete withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan. The second would be to extend the basic freedoms of individuals in the Soviet Union, so that they can have the right to exercise their religious beliefs, to monitor your government's implementation of the Helsinki accords, to emigrate or to join their families abroad where they have become divided.

The second matter is action against terrorism. I welcome the agreement that our experts should get together to discuss this problem. I hope that a meeting will yield some practical results.

Let me say finally that we in Britain genuinely want arms control agreements and are prepared to work for them. But you and I have always agreed on the right of each country to

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security: and agreements must preserve rather than erode that security, if they are to have our support. Such agreements are attainable and I hope that the Soviet Union will play its part in serious and detailed negotiation to achieve them.

I look forward to discussing these and other issues with you when I come to Moscow. Our officials are discussing possible dates.