



Prime Minister.

As you suspected, Mr.
Salter's ideas are not very
practical.

A.S.C. $\frac{16}{1}$

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

16 January 1984

Dear John,

Handwritten initials and signature

Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament: a New Approach

By agreement with the MOD I am replying to your letter of 3 January to Richard Mottram in which you asked for advice on Mr Stephen Salter's ideas for a new technical approach to the problem of nuclear disarmament. (Incidentally, according to our information, Mr Salter does not hold a chair at Edinburgh University.)

Mr Salter's proposals would involve each party to an agreement choosing from its opponent's arsenal the most threatening items up to a previously agreed percentage of "military value", for elimination. The initial percentage might be very small, say one per cent, but the process could continue indefinitely.

Ingenious as this approach is, there is nonetheless a gap between the mathematical exactness of the formula and the political realities which disarmament negotiations have to face. The approach is perhaps in principle more readily applicable to nuclear armed missiles than to other weapons. Nuclear disarmament cannot, however, be considered in isolation from the balance of conventional forces.

But the main obstacle to the negotiability of Mr Salter's ideas is that neither party to a negotiation is likely to agree to a procedure which would give its opponent total freedom to select which item in its armoury shall be eliminated. Each side's armoury contains a range of weapons which cannot be considered in isolation from each other. The elimination of one weapon would seriously jeopardise the role of another.

Finally, Mr Salter's approach would call for a degree of openness to inspection which the Russians have shown no willingness to accept. While the Russians claim to support verification procedures for prospective arms control agreements, there is a substantial difference between what they will tolerate in terms of inspection and compliance measures and what the West would regard as adequate.

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

/In summary



In summary, Mr Salter's ideas, thoughtful as they are, are unlikely to form the basis for a new approach to multi-lateral nuclear disarmament.

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram (MOD).

Yours ever,

Peter Ricketts



R B Bone
Private Secretary



FILE

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

17 January, 1984

MULTILATERAL NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT:
A NEW APPROACH

Thank you for your letter of 16 January. The Prime Minister was grateful for your analysis of Mr. Stephen Salter's ideas and notes your conclusion that they are unlikely to form the basis for a new approach to multilateral nuclear disarmament.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence).

A. J. COLES

R.B. Bone, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

3 January, 1984

Multi-lateral Nuclear Disarmament: A New Approach

I enclose a paper which was given to the Prime Minister some time ago by Professor Salter of the University of Edinburgh in which he advocates a new technical approach to the problem of nuclear disarmament. The Prime Minister doubts whether the proposition he advances is practical but she would be grateful for any advice which you wish to offer.

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I am copying this letter and enclosure to Roger Bone (Foreign and Commonwealth Office).

A. J. COLES

R. Mottram, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence

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John - Professor Sella not
this to me but it did
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MULTI-LATERAL NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT : A NEW APPROACH proposals,

However we had better check

It has been a feature of the many failed attempts to reduce the numbers of nuclear weapons that one side puts forward a rigid take-it-or-leave-it proposal which the other side receives with extreme caution. The fact that Side A proposes something is taken as sufficient evidence that it must be to the disadvantage of Side B. *with the military me*

It is reasonable to suppose that the difficulty in reaching agreement will be in proportion to the magnitudes at stake. It would therefore be harder to agree to a large cut than to a series of more modest steps.

The problem of matching one weapon system with another can lead to endless argument. Complications arise from the number of warheads, the mobility of launchers, the hardness of silos, the accuracy of guidance and the sophistication of evasion electronics. These matters would be difficult to resolve in a friendly discussion between the services of one power. But in the debate between rival super-powers it is safe to assume that the problem is quite intractable.

I therefore conclude that a successful scheme should proceed by small steps, that it should convince both sides that each has bettered the other and, most importantly, that it should not become embroiled in the difficulties of weapon comparison.

It has proved possible to design a mechanism which has these three characteristics. Indeed it can turn to advantage the inevitable differences of opinion about weapons of the two sides. It is based on the 'I cut - you choose' rule by which children can divide a cake.

The plan would work as follows. Each side begins by assigning a number to each separable nuclear device in its armoury. This number, which we may call a *military value percentage* is chosen by the weapon owner to represent his view of the usefulness of the item as a part of his entire inventory. The sum of all the numbers of each side is equal to one hundred. To take an example, if the Soviet Union decided that the 350 missiles in the SS-20 system represented, say, 15% of its nuclear strength then the military value of each would be 0.04292 %.

The selection of numbers may involve heated advocacy by the service chiefs. But this discussion is an internal, private matter for each side. Everybody involved speaks the same language, shares the same patriotic motives and is ultimately subordinate to the military discipline imposed by a single Head of State.

It would be extraordinary if the values of usefulness chosen by one side were in exact agreement with the magnitude of threat felt by the other. Indeed we may expect that the weapons with accurate terminal guidance and short launch times, which are suitable for pre-emptive first strikes, will induce a feeling of threat in their victims which is much greater than the feeling of comfort they offer to their owners. On the other hand, second-strike weapons are valuable deterrents and provide a large feeling of security, but do not pose a threat in proportion. It is precisely this *difference of opinion* which provides the incentive for the disarmament process and which ensures that both sides can believe that they have secured advantage. I was encouraged to discover that this somewhat paradoxical conclusion had been reached by sound mathematical reasoning. (See Dubins and Spanier, Amer. Math. Monthly, Vol. 68, 1961).

The first reduction should be very small. Let us suppose that it is a step of about 1%. Each side picks from the list of its opponent the most threatening items with total military value percentage not exceeding this 'table limit'.

The selections may be announced simultaneously and small differences carried forward as credits for a second round.

If the Americans happened to decide that the SS-20 was the most serious threat they would request as a first move that the number of missiles be reduced by 23. Meanwhile the Russians would pick the most threatening 1% of weapons from the American list. The Americans would be quite indifferent about the Russian choice because the numbers would have been chosen to make any 1% selection equal, in their view, to any other.

Both sides will think they benefit from this exchange by an amount which depends on the ratio of perceived threat removed to perceived protection lost. The process will seem exciting and even enjoyable to the selectors. They will be taking out the weapons which they see as posing the greatest threat and paying for this pleasure with reductions which, in their own judgement, are as indistinguishable as the dollar or rouble bills in their wallets.

The absolute, as opposed to the relative, magnitude of the reductions of each side, measured in terms of fire-power or lethality, will be greater for the power with the greater original armoury. But as each side argues that the other has the excess they can hardly object to this feature of the scheme.

The problem of verification is common to all disarmament plans. A necessary assumption for any scheme is that both sides have reasonably accurate knowledge of the weapon systems of their opponents. This assumption is supported by several factors. Firstly, unknown weapons do not deter, and reluctance to disclose one's weapons can lead to accusations that one is preparing a surprise war-fighting system rather than a deterrent. Secondly, modern satellite techniques provide outstanding surveillance. Thirdly, the Soviet Union is now much more amenable to site inspections than in earlier years.

If the reductions proceed by small, slow steps then neither side need fear that its national security has been greatly endangered if verification goes wrong. However, if a side is sincere about its wish to disarm it can use the interpretation of verification procedures to send messages about its sincerity and entice the other side to continue.

Either side may wish to distort the percentage values it declares. But because the sum total is always equal to one hundred a reduction in one area must necessarily mean an increase in another. Distortion is quite legitimate but the ploy may backfire and lead to the loss of good weapons at less than their true value. If one gives any credit to the intelligence services of one's opponent it will probably be best to make the military values as accurate a reflection of one's views as possible.

I had feared that the scheme would collapse under the pressure to modernise weapons. But it has proved possible to design rules which allow updating to occur. For example if Side A insists on the introduction of some new missiles it may do so provided that it also declares a military value percentage for them. Side B may then, without loss to its armoury, remove items to that same value from any part of Side A's inventory including the new ones. Side A will not want the new ones to be instantly lost and so will have to put a higher than true value on them. It will therefore have to give up rather more of its obsolete inventory. This rule would encourage the evolution of new weapons which provide high perceived security for low perceived threat - a most desirable feature.

The mathematicians have extended the rules for cake-sharing to divisions among more than two people. It is thus possible to devise ways in which the secondary nuclear powers can be brought in. However, I would hope that the Russians would agree to let the first few steps take place as a private arrangement between themselves and the Americans. The secondary nuclear powers can join the scheme once confidence has developed but before their smaller armouries become significant.

It is also possible to extend the idea to conventional forces but I am strongly in favour of clear definitions and therefore suggest that for the first stages the scheme should be confined to nuclear devices. There is some way to go before the danger of conventional forces equals the danger of nuclear ones and discussions about conventional weapons would be easier if tension could be reduced.

It must be admitted that the scheme may be very slow and indeed might never achieve complete disarmament. But the safest number of nuclear weapons might not be zero and a slow scheme will give us time to decide what that number might be. We are at present facing a dangerous increase in both quantity and accuracy. An arrangement which slowed the rate of increase would be good. One which stopped it would be better. But one which reversed it by even the smallest amount would be best of all and would produce a very large relaxation in tension. Just as in levitation, the first millimetre will be the hardest!

Stephen Salter
Department of Mechanical Engineering
University of Edinburgh

May 1983

cc Russ
Well Question

STATEMENT BY THE RIGHT HON SIR GEOFFREY HOWE QC MP, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS, IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ON 24 JANUARY 1984 ON THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT IN EUROPE (CDE)

TO BE CHECKED
AGAINST DELIVERY

Last week I attended the opening meeting in Stockholm of the Conference on Confidence and Security Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe, known as the CDE. It is the first of the follow-up Conferences agreed at the CSCE review meeting in Madrid last September; and the opening was attended by the Foreign Ministers or their equivalents of all 35 participating states. On Friday (20 January) I delivered an opening speech on behalf of the United Kingdom. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

This is the first time that so many states have met together specifically to tackle some very basic questions affecting the security of Europe. The aim is to lower tension and reduce the risk of war, by finding practical ways of improving mutual confidence and trust.

Together with our Allies, we are today tabling proposals which, as the terms of reference of the Conference require, are militarily significant, politically binding, verifiable and applicable to the whole of Europe. We are proposing measures designed:

firstly, to reduce secrecy by the exchange of information and by the observation and inspection of military activities;

secondly, to make clear provision for the advance notification and reporting of military activity;

third, to promote stability and to inhibit the use or threat of force for political purposes;

and fourth, to facilitate crisis management in periods of tension and to reduce the risk of surprise attack.

If we can secure agreement on measures of this kind, I have no doubt that Europe will be a safer place. We would then be in a position, as I told the Conference, to consider moving to further stages of negotiation, providing for the restriction of military activities and for reductions in force levels. The first job must be to build a basis of confidence, by measures of the kind I have described.

I emphasised that arms control negotiations alone cannot and should not have to bear the full weight of East/West relations. The dialogue between East and West needs to be broadened and given more substance.

My meeting with Mr Gromyko on Thursday (19 January) thus gave me the opportunity to discuss with him not only arms control, but East/West relations more generally, as well as the Middle East. I also raised with him the question of Soviet fulfilment of its international commitments in the field of human rights. We agreed that arrangements should be made for a further meeting between us.

The opening of the Stockholm Conference came at a difficult time in East/West relations. The difficulties remain. But I hope that I shall be proved right in seeing in the events of last week signs of a new determination to tackle them. We must look to the causes of tension and try to reduce them. At Stockholm and elsewhere, that remains our purpose.

Disarmament (Stockholm Conference)

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Sir Geoffrey Howe): Last week I attended the opening meeting in Stockholm of the Conference on Confidence and Security Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe, known as the CDE. It is the first of the follow-up conferences agreed at the CSCE review meeting in Madrid last September; and the opening was attended by the Foreign Ministers or their equivalents of all 35 participating states. On Friday, I delivered an opening speech on behalf of the United Kingdom. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

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Mr. Denis Healey (Leeds, East): The Foreign Secretary must realise that he has given us a depressing account of the recent meeting in Stockholm, which forms a startling contrast to the claim of all Government Ministers in recent months that the moment that cruise and

Pershing were deployed the Soviet Government would be prepared to talk to us and make concessions about everything. What must worry all people throughout the Western world is that technology is now moving at the speed of lightening and that diplomacy is moving with the stately majesty of a glacier. The responsibility for that must lie in part with Western Governments, including Her Majesty's Government.

Did the right hon. and learned Gentleman discuss with Mr. Gromyko during his talks last week the conclusion of all the leading Western scientists of the United States, Europe and the Soviet Union that if only one out of every 200 nuclear weapons possessed by the superpowers is used the country using that weapon will condemn its own people to slow starvation in arctic night? Does that not have important implications for all Governments on both sides of the iron curtain, and does it not make total nonsense of the attempt by the Soviet and Western Governments to pile more weapons on top of the totally redundant and unusable armouries that they already possess?

Would the right hon. and learned Gentleman tell us a little about the implications of his statement that it is important to discuss East-West relations more generally? Does he really believe that the Prime Minister's visit to Hungary will fulfil that need? Is it not rather like visiting the mayor of Reading because one does not want to talk to the leader of the GLC?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The right hon. Gentleman has revealed a curious insight into the pattern of international relations. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will visit Hungary between 2 and 4 February, and it is important to recognise that contact with all countries in the so-called Eastern bloc has a part to play in improving relations. Such contacts should be looked at and considered separately. Certainly they should all be undertaken alongside one another.

I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the scene we faced in Stockholm—indeed, the scene that the peoples of the world faced—is a depressing one simply because of the difficulty that has been faced in securing progress in the many fora for arms reduction. That is one of the features that overshadowed all our talks there. It is certainly true, as we were all well aware, that the use of any single nuclear weapon is something that should be avoided at all costs. It should also be remembered that the surplus of longer-range international nuclear forces held by the Soviet Union overshadows that of the United States by five to one, and there is a not quite so large but similarly daunting disparity in the possession of strategic missiles on the Soviet side. So it is of the utmost importance to press ahead with the negotiations that we are trying to get under way.

The glacier-like quality of decision taking in the Soviet Union is, unfortunately, a formidable feature of the scene that we have to face. We very much regret that the Soviet Union has withdrawn from the INF and START negotiations. We hope that discussion through the normal diplomatic channels will lead to a resumption of the MBFR talks on 15 and 16 March. It should be acknowledged that it was only the preparations of the Alliance for deployment that brought the Russians to negotiate in the first place. It is only by sticking to

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Canavan: When the Prime Minister casts her vote at the end of the Scott Lithgow debate, will she be batting for Britain or for overseas shipyards? Why is it so difficult to muster the political will and necessary money to intervene here in the renegotiation of a contract when she can find billions of pounds to spend on the Falkland Islands, including a handout of over £7 million for 54 prefabs to a Swedish company, with the possible help and intervention of a former British ambassador?

The Prime Minister: To secure business overseas British shipyards must be as good as any in the world. They must be able to produce their products within budget and on time. Only then shall we be able to compete with the rest of the world. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that since nationalisation, the taxpayer has paid about £165 million to Scott Lithgow, and, during the last year, the amount was equal to £13,000 per employee. We must win contracts by being very good and by completing ships and rigs on time.

Mr. John Townend: Is it not a strange world in which the Welsh leader of the Opposition refuses to attend an international at Cardiff Arms park merely because a team of mixed race schoolboys from South Africa is there? Is

it not even stranger when Ministers at the Welsh Office take the same action? As the Russian have committed far more acts against humanity than have the South Africans, should we not end such double standards and either discourage Russian teams or give notice that we wish to terminate the Gleneagles agreement?

The Prime Minister: I cannot terminate the Gleneagles agreement, to which this country is a party, and which we must uphold. It is a voluntary agreement and we try to see that it is honoured in that spirit. I understand that it was a very good match.

Mr. Sedgemore: Talking about scroungers, may I ask the Prime Minister to tell us whether it was her influence or that of the Cementation company that enabled her son to fly through Oman on a plane owned by the Omani air force—or does she not care to distinguish between grace and favour business deals and grace and favour political deals?

The Prime Minister: I answer for carrying out my public duties, and they are all in the public domain. Members of my family are as much entitled to privacy as those of any other citizen in the United Kingdom. We have not yet reached the stage when parents and their sons have to report everything to the authorities. If it comes to that, 1984 will be here.

NATO's INF policy that we shall show the Soviet Union that agreement on all these matters remains profoundly in its interests.

Mr. Healey: The right hon. and learned Gentleman appears not to have listened to what I said, or even to have read the papers that were prepared by his own advisers. Is it not the case that in long-range nuclear missiles and strategic nuclear weapons there is now rough parity between the Soviet Union and the West? That has been conceded by all leading spokesmen of the United States and, until this afternoon, by spokesmen of Her Majesty's Government.

Secondly, does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept the view expressed by leading scientists in the United States, Britain, Europe and the Soviet Union that to use even one out of 200 of the existing nuclear weapons would condemn the world to the destruction of humanity and the slow death of our populations in arctic night? Has he drawn any conclusions from this important finding?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I need no reminding of the emphatic importance of avoiding the use of nuclear weapons and of taking all the steps we are seeking to take, wherever we have the opportunity, to secure their reduction for precisely the reasons offered by the right hon. Gentleman in his closing remarks.

In reply to the right hon. Gentleman's first question, the destructive power of Soviet strategic missiles is more than twice as great as that of the United States. In regard to longer-range intermediate nuclear forces, the Russians possess a superiority of five to one. Those are the reasons why we should be so concerned.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): Will the Foreign Secretary accept that many countries in NATO now want to see a meeting between President Reagan and Mr. Andropov? Since Mr. Andropov's health is reported to be better and he is likely to be seen in public, will the British Government make it clear that they wish such a public meeting to take place? In regard to the confidence-building measures, will NATO now propose in Stockholm a corridor in which we will withdraw battlefield nuclear weapons, which would be the best confidence-building measure that could be taken and which would alleviate the considerable public concern about any battlefield nuclear war fighting strategy?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As I said in my statement, the Stockholm conference at this stage is concerned only with measures that arise out of the terms of reference that were agreed after a great deal of tribulation at Madrid, so it is not the appropriate place in which to make a proposal of the kind referred to by the right hon. Gentleman. As I also said in my statement, if we are able to reach agreement on the measures that are within the terms of reference, we shall want to see whether we can go further in the direction suggested by the right hon. Gentleman.

In regard to visits between President Reagan and Mr. Andropov, I am not, of course, able to give any definite information about Mr. Andropov's health, although we must all hope that it is improving. It will be for the President of the United States to consider the suggestion made by the right hon. Gentleman. Certainly we believe that it would be desirable to intensify the dialogue, both in quantity and in quality, at all levels, remembering that if there is anything less fruitful than the absence of

meetings at top level it is a meeting that has been inadequately prepared. We must take encouragement from the fact that in a speech last week President Reagan offered to the Soviet Union a constructive and realistic working relationship, which is appropriate.

Sir Peter Blaker (Blackpool, South): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware there will be a welcome from the House for the fact that the British Government have put forward these practical proposals? Was he able to discern in the remarks of the spokesman for the official Opposition this afternoon any practical proposal related to the purpose of the conference, which is to improve confidence-building measures in Europe, or any practical proposal at all?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his remarks and I leave him to confirm the judgment he made.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (Down, South): If, in the words which the Secretary of State has just used, the use of a nuclear weapon is to be avoided "at all costs", what is the point of having one?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I think it is universally acknowledged that the possession of these fearful weapons has probably been the most important foundation of the absence of war in Western Europe during the past 38 years.

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): While entirely predictable, is it not regrettable that the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) should once again be seeking to blame the Western democracies for the failure of the recent nuclear arms negotiations? Bearing in mind that since the start of the INF talks in 1981 the Soviet Union has deployed no fewer than 108 SS20 missiles, each the equivalent of 100 Hiroshima bombs, it is utterly unwarranted that it should use as a pretext to walk out of the INF talks the deployment of a couple of score of Western missiles in Western Europe? Would it not be more appropriate for the right hon. Member for Leeds, East, instead of castigating the NATO allies, to urge upon the Soviet leadership that it should resume its place in these talks?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. One SS20 has been deployed during each of the weeks of the two years since the deployment of SS20s started. Throughout those two years the United States persisted in its participation in the INF negotiations. It is a matter for extreme regret that the Soviet Union chose to discontinue those talks as it did and when it did. It is entirely right for my hon. Friend to urge upon the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) and the House the need to remind the Soviet Union of the need for it to return to negotiations and the extent to which we are willing to welcome it.

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that in his address Mr. Gromyko accused the United States of thinking in terms of war, especially since the deployment of cruise missiles in Western Europe? In view of the growing opposition of the British public to the deployment of cruise on British soil, which has been shown in recent opinion polls, will he bear that fact in mind when he next meets Mr. Gromyko?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I shall bear considerably in mind that the British public supported the Government's policy at the general election. As the House knows, deployment is taking place notwithstanding the sustained attempts by the West to secure participation by the Soviet Union in meaningful negotiations. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that Mr. Gromyko referred to the conduct of the United States in terms that were intemperate and disrespectful. I reminded the conference of the proposition which Mr. Gromyko quoted from Mr. Andropov, in which he called for the conduct of calm and respectful relations between states. I hope that that advice will be heeded by the Soviet Union itself.

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that there is an uncanny symmetry between the negotiating tactics used by the Leader of the Opposition on the Elgin marbles and his position on the British nuclear deterrent.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend makes an entirely fair comparison, which is not one to be taken lightly. If the Leader of the Opposition were ever to be in a position to decide matters of this sort, he would be making decisions similar to those that he made on the Elgin marbles but of much greater gravity to the British people.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): As the right hon. and learned Gentleman recognises the importance of confidence-building measures, may we assume that the rhetoric of war will come out of the Prime Minister's speech-making vocabulary? Does he see as part of the process of confidence building an exchange of visits between the Soviet leadership and leaders from Britain at a fairly early date?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The rhetoric of war has no part in my right hon. Friend's vocabulary. The position adopted by the Government has been to declare firmly our determination to defend the interests of the British people if necessary and, equally fairly, our determination to seek disarmament by any legitimate means.

As for the prospect of further contacts, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry, will be visiting the Soviet Union in May at the next meeting of the Anglo-Soviet Joint Commission. We hope to be able to welcome to Britain before long the First Deputy Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union, Mr. Kornienko. I hope to be able to arrange a meeting of a more substantial sort with Mr. Gromyko before we meet, as will be the normal practice, at the United Nations General Assembly.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): Will my right hon. and learned Friend take the opportunity of pouring scorn on the somewhat convoluted metaphors of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) about Arctic glaciers and mayors, and acknowledge the two real reasons why there was no fundamental progress in the talks? Does he agree that Mr. Gromyko could not take any initiatives because of the paralysing sickness of Mr. Andropov, and did not want to take any initiatives for fear that they might help President Reagan in his re-election?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot pronounce upon the second reason given by my hon. Friend, but it is certainly a factor that is suggested. Nor can one be sure of the impact of Mr. Andropov's health on the Soviet Union's position. The decision-taking process within the Soviet

Union, even under normal conditions, is a slow and protracted one. That is why it will be necessary for us to maintain the presentation of the urgency of our case for genuine, verifiable and balanced disarmament with tenacity and purpose.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dumfermline, West): Will the Secretary of State, in terms of confidence-building measures, reveal how many manoeuvres on either side have been examined by observers from either side? Have any of those manoeuvres involved the observation of battlefield nuclear weapons? If the right hon. and learned Gentleman resists the area of activity that we are discussing as being the appropriate forum, which forum will we deploy to discuss the prevalence in Europe of large quantities of so-called battlefield nuclear weapons that will be used, overrun or destroyed within hours of a nuclear war?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot without notice answer the hon. Gentleman's specific factual questions. The negotiations have relatively restricted first terms of reference that do not take us as far as consideration of battlefield nuclear weapon control. The INF and START negotiations have been broken off, and we hope shortly to resume the MBFR negotiations in Vienna. It is worth noticing, however, that since 1979 there has been a reduction of about 2,400 in the warheads available to NATO within Europe.

Several Hon. Members rose—

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is an important statement, but I remind the House that later this afternoon we shall have two important Opposition day debates and a ten-minute Bill. I propose to take three questions from each side.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will my right hon. and learned Friend, in seeking to re-establish the MBFR talks in Vienna, bear in mind that those talks, until they were abruptly called off, had persisted since 1973 without any progress because the Soviet Union refused a proportionate reduction in armed forces? Will my right hon. and learned Friend therefore make certain that the Western powers are not strung along in the new Vienna talks while the Soviet Union continues to augment its nuclear build-up?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I take the force of my hon. Friend's point. We believe that the Western draft treaty at those talks remains a sound basis for agreement. Obviously we will keep the prospects and progress of the negotiations under review when and if they start, and we will ensure that they are not used as a substitute for action in other directions if we can achieve that.

Mr. Norman Atkinson (Tottenham): Is it not a fact that every NATO and Chinese nuclear weapon can reach and is targeted upon Soviet territory, yet only a small proportion of Soviet nuclear weapons can reach and is targeted upon United States' territory? Is it not a fact that, until that understanding spreads throughout the NATO leadership, little or no progress will be made at any future meetings, whether or not the Soviet Union returns to the negotiating table in March or at any other time?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It is important to try to secure progress in any of the many negotiations that are occurring. The first condition to establish the prospects for

progress is for the Soviet Union to be willing to return to meaningful negotiations. That is why we are insistent upon our willingness to receive the Soviets as soon as they return.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Following the declaration of the NATO powers on 9 December that their weapons would never be used first except in response to attack, did the Western powers consider not only today's measures but tabling at the conference a new draft treaty that there will be no first use of any weapons by either side which would go some way towards meeting the Warsaw proposal for a non-aggression pact?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: NATO has repeatedly said that it will never use any weapons, nuclear or conventional, in response to attack. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."]—except in response to attack. I am sorry if I misled the House. NATO has repeatedly said that it will never use any any weapons, nuclear or conventional, except in response to attack. A similar obligation is entered into by each member of the United Nations, and we believe that that is the right position.

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): Does the Secretary of State wish to comment on Mr. Shultz's reference in Stockholm to artificial barriers in Europe, which could only refer to reunification of Germany? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman feel that that helped the peace talks?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It has long been recognised by successive Governments that the division of Germany is not something which is likely to or should endure permanently. Equally, it has long been recognised that the division of Europe based purely on a sharp differentiation between East and West is not for the long-term good of the continent. We must all hope that divisions of that kind will be replaced by a growing sense of the unity of culture and history which is part of the European continent.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that if the Soviet Union is genuine in its desire to build up mutual confidence and trust it should immediately increase the number of exit visas for people who wish to leave that country and release Anatoly Shcharansky from imprisonment?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I agree with the force of my hon. Friend's point. I made it clear to Mr. Gromyko that the extent to which the Soviet Union is willing to fulfil its

international commitments on human rights has an important impact on international perception of that country and confidence in its actions. I could not bring every specific case to his attention, but I selected a number of examples, all of which involve the ill health of the people concerned and specifically Mr. Anatoly Shcharansky and Mrs. Bonner Sakharov.

Mr. Healey: Does the Foreign Secretary agree—even Mr. Nitze and Mr. Kvitsinsky agree on this—that before the weapons were deployed by the West the Soviet Government offered to reduce the number of intermediate-range warheads to under half the number deployed when NATO took its dual track decision in December 1979, as both sides have confirmed? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that we now face a far more dangerous situation in which both sides are continuing to pile up weapons which have no conceivable political, military or other advantage, especially in view of the discovery of the risk of a nuclear winter if just one out of 200 existing weapons were ever used? Does he accept that many Opposition Members and, I suspect, Conservative Members cannot accept the hibernation of our Foreign Secretary when the world faces such dangers, although winter and summer seem to make little difference to the right hon. and learned Gentleman and he seems not even to understand the Government's policy as we realised when he informed us, I hope rightly, that the British Government would never use nuclear weapons in response to an attack?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The right hon. Gentleman has to look a long way to find any points to make and they all lack validity. The matter is too serious for such triviality. Far from hibernating, we are devoted to the pursuit of effective, balanced, verifiable disarmament measures.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the Soviet Union's offer during the INF talks. It is difficult to be confident or certain about what the final offer was, but it seems to have been 120 SS20s within range of Western Europe—

Mr. Healey: That is fewer than in 1979.

Sir Geoffrey Howe:—in return for no deployment of United States weapons. The Soviet Union would have remained in possession of 800 SS20 warheads world wide. It will have modernised its weapons considerably since 1979. As the offer involved no United States deployment in Western Europe, it would not have been a balanced or satisfactory conclusion.

Ministerial Responsibility and Accountability

4 pm

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): I wish to raise a point of order of which I have given you, Mr. Speaker, notice. It touches the heart of the issue of ministerial responsibility and the accountability of Ministers to the House.

Last Tuesday I tabled seven questions to the Secretary of State for Energy about the safety of the civil nuclear programme and the incidence of cancer at Sellafield. Yesterday I was astonished to receive a reply from the Minister saying that the questions had been transferred to the chairman of British Nuclear Fuels Ltd., and that a copy of the chairman's answer to me would be placed in the Library. It is extraordinary that a Minister should abdicate his statutory responsibilities in favour of the chairman of a company.

I have worked in the Department of Energy, and I know that the Secretary of State is charged with overall responsibility for the safety of the British civil nuclear programme. If the chairman of BNFL gives me a wrong or misleading answer, what shall I do? Is he responsible, or is the Minister responsible?

BNFL faces the possibility of prosecution by the Director of Public Prosecutions, and an eminent scientist is studying the incidence of cancer in and around Sellafield. At such a time, Ministers may well wish to wash their hands of what BNFL is doing. However, they are statutorily responsible, and it would be a help to the House and to the nation if they were to answer before the House. I ask for your guidance on this point, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman gave me notice of his point of order. However, I am sorry to have to tell him that I have no responsibility for the content of ministerial answers.

North England and Scotland (Weather Conditions)

Mr. Martin J. O'Neill (Clackmannan): I have given you notice of my point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the blizzards which are hitting the northern part of the country, and Scotland in particular, would it be possible for you to use your good offices with the Leader of the House to ensure that the Secretary of State for Scotland will make a clear statement in the House as soon as possible about what is happening and the damage that is being done?

Mr. Speaker: I shall not need to use my good offices, as the Leader of the House and the Secretary of State for Scotland are both present.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): For your information, Mr. Speaker, I should like to say that the police and rescue services in my constituency, which has been badly hit, have kept me fully in the picture.

Questions to Ministers

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You kindly advised the House last week that when an hon. Member had a question on the Order Paper his prospects of being called to put a supplementary question were enhanced. If an hon. Member puts a supplementary question at Question Time, are his chances of asking a question on a statement reduced?

Mr. Speaker: That might seem to be an impertinent suggestion. Let us leave it at that.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS &c.

Ordered,

That the Draft Grants to Redundant Churches Fund Order 1984 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—[*Mr. Garel-Jones.*]