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Prime Minister.

Content with this approval?

A.S.C. 7/3.

PM/84/38PRIME MINISTERMBFR

1. At our meeting before Christmas, OD(D) authorised UK officials to contribute to intra-Alliance efforts to devise a tactical counter-move in MBFR, without prejudging the desirability of a new Western move. We agreed that Ministers should keep the negotiations under review. Since then there have been some developments of which OD(D) should be aware.
2. Following the decision of NATO Foreign Ministers last December to review the state of the MBFR negotiations, a strong feeling has grown within the Alliance, clearly shared by the Americans, that the West now needs to make a counter-move to retain the initiative in the negotiations, which are due to resume on 16 March. In practice East and West tend to take it in turns to make major new presentations of their negotiating positions at approximately yearly intervals. The last move was that tabled by the East in June 1983 and described in papers circulated earlier to OD(D).
3. Over recent months, the Germans have advocated, in response to Eastern pressure, that the West should no longer insist on both sides first agreeing on their troop strengths before getting locked into a reductions agreement. Instead, they have suggested that some symbolic US and Soviet reductions should be made; and that there should be a contractual freeze for up to two years during which a set of "verification measures" such as on-site inspection of military installations could be

/used to



used to establish to mutual satisfaction what actual Eastern force strengths were. If this process were successful, the Germans argue that the major reductions could then take place; but if not, either side would be free to withdraw.

4. There were early signs that this line of thinking had attractions for the US Chief Negotiator in Vienna (who is energetic, and understandably wanted results) and that he in turn was beginning to prevail on George Shultz. UK officials, however, have argued strongly - in line with the principles endorsed by OD(D) - that the German approach seemed likely to put at risk a number of important Western political and security interests. In particular we had in mind the dangers of appearing to concede the long-standing objective of prior agreement on data and of a freeze contractualising the present Eastern superiority. In our view there could be no guarantee that the East would in the meantime remove their unacknowledged numerical advantage or that the data dispute would not simply be perpetuated at a much later stage under politically disadvantageous conditions.

5. After a long period of internal gestation the Americans last week produced their own conclusions endorsed by the National Security Council chaired by the President himself. It is gratifying to see that the American position is much more balanced than at one time might have been feared. This undoubtedly reflects the impact made by British views, for which a number of officials both in the State Department and the Pentagon have said they were especially grateful. The essence of the revised American approach, as conveyed to me by George Shultz on behalf of the Administration as a whole, is the following:

(a) a clear re-statement that there could be no MBFR Treaty and no reductions before the East has provided information

/about



about its relevant force strengths, appropriately broken down and falling within a satisfactory range of Western intelligence estimates (i.e. the range of normal margins of error). The US approach would not require the provision of this information to be described as a "formal agreement on data" (in the sense of including it formally in the Treaty) but it would still be an absolute precondition to Treaty signature;

(b) In order to focus the negotiation on the forces which pose the greatest threat, while at the same time providing an opportunity to the East to table new data in a format not previously used, the American approach would propose to concentrate this data requirement on combat and combat-support forces (accounting for up to 80% of Warsaw Pact strength), leaving service support forces temporarily to one side. But the same overall ceilings of 900,000 ground and air force manpower combined (700,000 ground forces) which include service support elements would remain the final objective of the reductions process;

(c) the US approach would require new Eastern flexibility in meeting our verification concerns and their agreement to an appropriately enhanced verification package to ensure that Alliance concerns would be fully met.

6. These ideas were explained more fully by the Americans to UK and German officials in Bonn on 27 February. The Germans are likely to remain attached to their own ideas at least until after Chancellor Kohl's visit to Washington on 7 March. But they will probably calculate that if the trilateral partners are to clear agreed ideas through wider NATO channels in time for possible use in the forthcoming round of MBFR negotiations, they will have to put aside the more controversial elements of these fairly soon. In my view the American approach - with

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further work - should provide the basis for a robust new presentation of Western negotiating objectives which can be put forward in such a way as to respond to Eastern concerns. I have told George Shultz that I would wish to commend this approach to you and Michael Heseltine as a basis for the further work that officials will undertake in Washington and London during the next fortnight. Now that this whole exercise is back on the right lines we should in my view work to maximise the presentational possibilities while insisting that no MBFR outcome would be acceptable which did not:

(a) establish at the outset the necessary agreed basis of confidence about the size and shape of forces to be reduced: and

(b) provide a set of verification measures fully adequate to ensure that reductions are taken and residual ceilings observed.

Given the long history of Eastern intransigence in MBFR I cannot pretend that this revised approach will lead to any breakthrough in the short term. Nor should it be a substitute for a longer term rethink of the Western approach to conventional arms control. But it would meet the widespread Alliance feeling that a tactical counter-move in MBFR is now necessary and would do so in a way that preserves Western negotiating objectives and security interests.

7. I am copying this to Michael Heseltine and Sir Robert Armstrong.

(GEOFFREY HOWE)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
1 March 1984

Defense : Arms Control A75.

SECRET



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

7 March 1984

MBFR

The Prime Minister has seen the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's minute of 1 March containing his recommendations on the Western approach to the MBFR negotiations in the coming months.

Subject to the views of the Secretary of State for Defence, the Prime Minister is content with this approach.

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

E. J. COLES

Roger Bone Esq
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

SECRET



McGiles
8 26/3

MO 13/1/16/4

Prime Minister⁽²⁾
The Defence Secretary is content
with the revised approach to
MBFR proposed by the FCS.

PRIME MINISTER

DMS
19/3

MBFR

I have seen the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's minute of 1st March and your Private Secretary's letter of 7th March confirming that you are content, subject to my views, to agree to the proposed change in the Western position on MBFR.

2. Until the details of the new US initiative are fully worked out, particularly the enhancement of the verification measures, it is difficult to reach a final view on its merits. We shall need to watch how the package of verification measures fares in discussion in the Alliance as a whole. But realistically there is little we could do at this stage - even if we wanted to - to stop the US putting forward their proposals, without creating an impression of Alliance disunity which we have always, rightly, been anxious to avoid.

3. I have also in any case some doubts about whether what is proposed is very significant. I can see the attractions for the Alliance in moving to recapture the presentational high ground at Vienna but I doubt whether this package will do that. Nor do I see it breaking the deadlock with the Russians over the data argument. There is not so far as I can see a package within the presently defined MBFR framework which would break through the deadlock without also having unacceptable implications for Western security interests. With present political sentiments in the US on withdrawal from Europe the risks involved in significant movement on MBFR are clear enough. We



must guard against starting a process on certain conditions, finding those conditions are not being fulfilled and then being unable, for political reasons, to repudiate the process.

4. While therefore I am content to proceed as proposed, I do not believe that it gets us very far. I agree with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary that it cannot be a substitute for a longer term rethink of the Western approach to conventional arms control, to which I wish to give further thought.

5. I am copying this minute to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Ministry of Defence
16th March 1984

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