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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1
Telephone 01-~~3307022~~X 218 2111/3

MO 15/3

2nd July 1980

ms.
Prime Minister

(2)

Dear Michael,

Paul

BUILD UP OF SOVIET FORCES

There have been recent Press reports concerning the strengthening of Soviet Forces in Central Europe. The most recent of these has been a report that the Soviet Central Committee have called for "all-round strengthening of the defence potential of our State". My Secretary of State thought that the Prime Minister might like to have the facts, as follows:

- a. We have firm information that something under a half of the Soviet divisions in Eastern Europe have recently been strengthened by additional tanks in reconnaissance battalions, and by additional artillery and mechanised infantry in tank regiments.
- b. If this strengthening were carried through to all Soviet divisions in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland (as we expect it to be) it would result in an estimated additional 25,000 troops, 930 artillery pieces, 156 tanks and 800 armoured personnel carriers.
- c. In parallel, Mr Brezhnev appears to be progressing with his promised withdrawal of men and tanks from Eastern Germany. Of the "up to 20,000 men and 1,000 tanks" which he undertook to withdraw by 1st October 1980,

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we believe about 13-14,000 men and about 700 tanks have already been withdrawn with some guns and APCs. This is being accomplished by the removal of a complete Guards Tank Division and certain tank training regiments

d. The picture is, therefore, one of a significant strengthening of numerous army divisions concurrent with the withdrawal of certain other units. The net result, should the strengthening of all Soviet divisions take place, appears likely to be an increase of 5,000 men, with artillery and APCs, over pre-Brezhnev force levels. There seems likely to be a reduction in the number of tanks, though of course it is the older ones which are being withdrawn and the newer T-64s and T-72s which are replacing them.

The Soviet actions will complicate still further the current MBFR negotiations, where the major stumbling block to progress has been the inability of the participants to agree on the true size of Eastern Forces in Central Europe. The Russians have in turn been attempting to make propaganda from the allegation that US forces have increased by 20,000 men since 1976 (figures tabled on 17th June in the MBFR negotiations show that US forces have indeed increased by 18,000 in ground forces and 8,000 in air forces) and they can be expected to make capital out of this in any public debate.

My Secretary of State would not advise that a public issue is made at present of the Soviet increases. They have been carried out only in rather less than half the Soviet Divisions although we would expect in all eventually; it would be advisable to see if the trend continues before considering the release of information (this would in any case, because some of it is from a US source, require prior consultation with the Americans). It would also be necessary to consider carefully before making any public statement the implications for the MBFR negotiations.

I am sending copies of this letter to George Walden (FCO) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever
Brian Norbury

(B M NORBURY)

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Defence

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

7 July, 1980.

Build up of Soviet Forces

The Prime Minister has seen and taken note of your letter to me of 2 July on this subject.

I am sending copies of this letter to George Walden (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

M. O'D. B. ALEXANDER

B.M. Norbury, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence.

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