

MR COLES ✓ A.S.C. 9/3 .

EAST/WEST RELATIONS: FURTHER STEPS

1. The Prime Minister's visits to Budapest and Moscow were successful: they attained the limited objectives set. But we need to look further ahead and consider how to maintain the momentum, although without conning ourselves, or the public, on what crops can be grown on this very stony soil.

2. There are two main aspects:
 - (a) better high level Soviet/British contacts.

 - (b) visible British activity in serious arms control and disarmament proposals.

3. On (a), the obvious objective is a visit by a Soviet leader with potential, ideally Gorbachev, to the United Kingdom. The timing might be the end of this year or early next. I am, however, doubtful whether the Russians would be prepared to give us this prize without our having earned our passage with lower level contacts first, and possibly without greater signs of receptivity on our part to Soviet arguments. There are dangers in this, since a ground rule of the game has to be that we are not prepared to pay for activity as such with any concession of substance. At the least I think further exchanges between the Foreign Secretary and Mr Gromyko will be inevitable as preliminaries and there may be middle level contacts we ought also to be trying to activate as a step towards the ultimate high level visit.

4. On (b) we need to select the most promising areas. There are some, like INF/START, where the initiative is not in UK hands and others which would probably not serve Western interests, eg a comprehensive test ban. The best runner at the moment is

chemical weapons. We have been prominent in advocating a ban and in February tabled a paper on challenge inspection. The Russians have gone some way towards the idea of challenge inspection and have accepted the principle of continuous on-site inspection for stockpile destruction. Chernenko on 2 March supported a complete ban on chemical weapons, not just a weapon-free zone in Europe, and referred in vague terms to Soviet agreement to monitor their destruction. I am not clear why the Russians have gone so far towards accepting some kind of verification, particularly given the scale of their activity in this field, but it is in the Western interest to pursue this and in British interests to be seen to be playing a prominent part. I think our knowledge of Soviet chemical warfare capability reinforces rather than upsets this reasoning and would argue that any decision on a new Western or West European retaliatory capability should await a serious effort in the disarmament field. The next step is for the Americans to table a draft Treaty in Geneva. We should urge them to expedite this. But in the meantime we should seek to publicise the role the UK are playing. This is solid disarmament work and we should extract as much mileage as possible from it.

5. The next possibility is MBFR. The problem here has been an over-enthusiastic and naive German proposal, exemplifying the chronic weakness of Western negotiators, a penchant for concessions of substance in order to maintain momentum. We have won the Americans over to a more robust view and were hoping that a sensible but positive Western proposal would emerge before MBFR negotiations resume on 16 March. The latest news is that the Germans still need more persuading. But the prospects are reasonable and MBFR looks like the second area where we and the West will be able to show activity.

6. The third is probably the most important and certainly the most difficult, ie military use of space. Our own thoughts on ASATS need to be looked at against the background of the US Strategic Defence Initiative (formerly Star Wars). This is a specialist's world. But it is permitted to doubt whether a really fool-proof ballistic missile defence system, capable of preventing as distinct from blunting a nuclear attack, can be devised. The Americans look as though they are set on their present course; and the danger is that their research programme will acquire a momentum of its own, prompting Soviet counter development and seriously upsetting the present strategic balance. In the process an opportunity for closing off one sector of East/West arms competition could be missed. This is currently an issue first for our own private reflection, secondly for US/UK consultation. But time is short.

John - I believe
a paper is being
from MOD.
M.

PERCY CRADOCK

9 March 1984

E/vi Pelm 2