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Soviet Nuclear Weapons

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Officials followed up the Prime Minister's discussion with President Mitterrand, reported in your letter of 3 December, by talking to Bartholomew (US) and Guelluy (France) in Brussels yesterday.

There was no problem about agreeing on our immediate aims: to disable and eventually dismantle all Soviet nuclear systems due to be scrapped under START and the Bush-Gorbachev initiatives; and to ensure that all remaining systems, which will probably be centralised in due course in Soviet or Russian hands, are effectively controlled. But clear differences emerged between the French and American approaches. The French wanted to begin by reaching a political understanding about command and control of all nuclear weapons in the Soviet Union, to be formalised in meetings of the four Foreign Ministers: there is clearly an element of status-seeking in this. The Americans wanted to keep their hands free for their bilateral exchanges with the Soviet authorities and the Republics, which were already moving ahead well under cover of implementing the Bush-Gorbachev nuclear cuts; they were also concerned not to offend other allies, especially Germany and Italy, by appearing to set up a nuclear directorate.

/We proposed



We proposed a procedure which combines both approaches. This would involve:

- detailed coordination among the Three about the aims which we should set out for the Centre and Republics and the realistic scope for Western help over dismantling nuclear weapons, safeguarding those which remain and preventing the export of Soviet arms technology;
- discussion of these issues with senior officials from the Centre and Republics in a 3+1 format;
- continuing consultation in the Alliance, with a view to securing a general blessing for the activities of the Three;
- contact between the allies and the Centre plus Republics in a 16+1 format, possibly following a meeting of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council.

We pointed out that this approach should meet President Mitterrand's aim by enabling the nuclear powers to steer this activity while galvanising the international support which will be necessary to meet the costs involved. Partly because of the cost, we also suggested that Japan and other potential contributors should be associated with the work of the Alliance.

The French and Americans said that they were attracted by this approach and undertook to seek political clearance in the next couple of days. The Americans will meanwhile press on with their bilateral contacts in Moscow and Kiev, which their Political Director will visit this week and Secretary Baker next week. The Americans are, in practice, already in the lead. They are finalising detailed technical

/proposals



proposals for helping to disable weapons in situ in the four Republics concerned (Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia and Kazakhstan). They have invited us and the French to feed in ideas as soon as possible. We will do so on the basis of the work already in hand in the MOD and FCO.

There is still a danger that the French and Americans will want to go their own different ways. Tactically, we need to tread a narrow path between them. In practical terms, we need to refine our proposals so that we can make a respectable technical input. We also need to recognise that dealing with the several thousands of warheads involved will entail very large costs. If we want this tackled quickly and effectively, this will involve expense to the international community. As a nuclear power and NPT depositary, we will be expected to participate: we have strong security and political interests in doing so.

Since these issues cover the interests of several departments, officials have agreed to set up an inter-departmental task force under Cabinet Office leadership.

Copies of this letter go to Simon Webb (MOD), Jeremy Heywood (HM Treasury), John Neilson (Department of Energy) and Sonia Phippard (Cabinet Office).

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