

PRIME MINISTER

COMPREHENSIVE CONCEPT

You asked to see some background papers on the Comprehensive Concept of arms control. The attached folder contains:

- a short explanatory note by the Cabinet Office;
- the first draft of a Comprehensive Concept put forward by the United Kingdom;
- the current NATO draft (which is a dog's breakfast and scarcely worth your reading);
- a paper on options for Short-range Nuclear Forces (SNF) arms control, which we recently put to the Germans to show how difficult it is to devise any acceptable option; and
- a letter on the same subject from Michael Alexander.

It all boils down to a simple question: can the Germans be brought to take firm and specific decisions on the modernisation of NATO's SNF without a commitment by the Alliance to negotiate with the Russians on further reductions in SNF? You have of course discussed the subject with Chancellor Kohl.

It is clear from the attached papers that Sir Michael Alexander and others are deep into examining possible options for SNF negotiations, either because they believe this is the best way to head off the Germans by demonstrating the damage which would be done to NATO's capabilities; or because (in Michael's case) they think that we are going to have to give in to the Germans on this and may as well start now. The problem is that it gives the wrong signal to the Germans. Once we concede it is a subject which can be discussed, there is no going back.

In the end it's a matter of judgment whether we can get the Germans to the right conclusion on modernisation without

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selling the pass on SNF negotiations. We did it - or just about - on the INF Agreement although it was a painful process. It will be even more difficult this time. My own view is that, rather than make concessions to them on SNF negotiations, we should look for some unilateral action by NATO, for instance linking modernisation of SNF with a unilateral decision to reduce SNF munitions and particularly nuclear shells (for which we have no real use).

This may be an issue which you will want to discuss with the Defence and Foreign Secretaries at one of the two meetings on defence matters we already have planned for January, namely Chemical Weapons and SDI. Agree?

*But who do I discuss it
with first? John Hartley would
be the best but he is no longer there.*

C.D.P.

not

CHARLES POWELL

22 December 1988

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The Alliance's Comprehensive Concept of
Arms Control and Disarmament

"We have directed the North Atlantic Council in Permanent Session, working in conjunction with the appropriate military authorities, to consider the further development of a comprehensive concept of arms control and disarmament. The arms control problems faced by the Alliance raise complex and interrelated issues which must be evaluated together, bearing in mind overall progress in the arms control negotiations enumerated above as well as the requirements of Alliance security and of its strategy of deterrence." (Reykjavik Communique)

This project, which is the responsibility of the NATO Ambassadors meeting as the North Atlantic Council in permanent session, was launched by Foreign Ministers at Reykjavik in June 1987. The NATO Foreign Ministers in Brussels this December directed that the work on the concept should be completed by June 1989, when NATO Foreign Ministers next hold a scheduled meeting in London. A NATO Summit earlier in 1989 would shorten the deadline further.

2. The so-called comprehensive concept is largely a procedural fig leaf to cover NATO's confusion about how to deal with short range nuclear forces (SNF) both in defence programme and in arms control terms. After the INF agreement the Germans took fright at the prospect that NATO's arms control agenda (START, conventional forces, chemical weapons) made no clear provision for further arms control on SNF. This phobia is encapsulated in their slogan: "The shorter the range, the deader the Germans". The dilemma over SNF was papered over with a formula to the effect that SNF reductions should be sought "in conjunction with the establishment of a conventional balance and the global elimination of chemical weapons". But there is no

agreement about whether this means a simultaneous or a sequential process. Moreover, the Germans argued that decisions on the necessary modernisation of SNF could not be taken piecemeal and needed to be related to the overall picture of how NATO's security needs are met and the place of arms control in this. The current difficulties in advancing the drafting of the comprehensive concept derive principally from this underlying problem, which has been accentuated by Gorbachev's adroit diplomacy.

3. For nine months after the Reykjavik directive to draw up a comprehensive concept virtually no progress was made. The Americans and the Germans both dragged their feet on the exercise, hoping thereby to stymie SNF arms control and modernisation respectively. In March 1988 the United Kingdom therefore circulated a full national draft of the comprehensive concept (Annex A) in an attempt to move things forward. We also tried to engage the Americans and the Germans behind the scenes in a trilateral effort to crack the problem. This offer was not taken up and we have therefore had to work on each of them separately. Meanwhile the NATO drafting exercise has stagnated, as the impoverished NATO draft of December 1988 (Annex B) shows. The nub of the drafting revolves around three points: - How is arms control.

a. Is arms control the handmaiden of defence policy, or are they full and equal partners?

Defence policy is of course predominant

b. How much if at all does Gorbachev's new thinking alter the equation?

Not at all

c. How to reconcile SNF arms control and modernisation.

The way we have agreed all along - no further nuclear reductions in the Convention. Symmetry is allowed, and chemical weapons also in effect.

4. If there is to be agreement on the comprehensive concept in the first half of 1989, it is increasingly the view of our Ambassadors in Bonn and NATO that a bargain must be struck which says something for German ears about the prospect of negotiations at some stage in relation to SNF, in return for some fairly precise guidelines on SNF modernisation (sufficient for United States Congressional purposes), accompanied by a decision on downward adjustment of NATO's existing stockpile of SNF warheads (~~especially of~~ nuclear artillery shells *only*). It is hard to devise an SNF arms control negotiating position as such which would meet NATO's security requirements.

But it is perhaps not wholly impossible to define a position which would give the Germans enough to meet their political needs while maintaining strong pressure on the Soviet Union to reduce its SNF preponderance and simultaneously presenting TASM and the Lance replacement as logical ways of restructuring the NATO stockpile in the direction of fewer SNF holdings overall. For this aim to be attainable during 1989, it will be essential to galvanise the Bush Administration quickly to address the whole subject with greater imagination than the Americans have so far shown. Without some break-through on this key issue between ourselves, Washington and Bonn, the comprehensive concept will continue to be little more than second order skirmishing.

Cabinet Office
19 December 1988

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