

SECRET



File 26 38
a R P Cadock

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

11 February 1986

ARMS CONTROL: MESSAGE TO PRESIDENT REAGAN

The Prime Minister has now approved the text for a message to President Reagan on the handling of arms control issues at the next US/Soviet Summit. It takes account of a considerable number of the amendments proposed in your letter of 10 February and Christopher Mallaby's letter of the same date. I enclose the signed copy and should be grateful if it could be transmitted urgently to Washington.

I am copying this letter, and enclosure, to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence) and Christopher Mallaby (Cabinet Office).

CHARLES POWELL

Len Appleyard, Esq., C.M.G.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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10 DOWNING STREET

SUBJECT

file EL 37

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THE PRIME MINISTER

11 February 1986

PRIME MINISTER'S

PERSONAL MESSAGE

SERIAL No. T30A/86.

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Dear Ron,

When George Shultz was here in December he suggested that I might let you have some thoughts on the handling of arms control issues at your next meeting with Mr. Gorbachev. At this early stage, I should like to put to you some general reflections. Nearer the time of the meeting I might - if you thought it useful - put forward some more specific ideas.

The starting point has to be how we assess Gorbachev's intentions. We have both had lengthy meetings with him. He is clearly a more astute operator than his predecessors, far more aware of the scope for playing on public opinion in the West. But under the veneer is the same brand of dedicated Soviet Communist that we have known in the past, relentless in pursuing Soviet interests and prepared to take his time over this. His main, indeed overriding, purpose will be to stop you from developing the SDI, both because he thinks it will give the United States a unilateral advantage and because he would much prefer to avoid the strain on the Soviet economy which having to match it or counter it will impose (though he will accept this if necessary). He will also try to use the issue to split the Alliance.

My judgment is that Gorbachev does not want a return to the pre-Geneva situation of no negotiation with the United States because he realises that this would actually reduce the Soviet Union's ability to exploit Western opinion. Equally knowing at first hand the strength of your commitment to pursuing SDI research, recently reaffirmed in your State of

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the Union message, he cannot be optimistic that agreement on terms acceptable to the Soviet Union is attainable in the short term. Unless he can see some prospect of an equitable deal, he may therefore come to your next Summit without any serious expectation of reaching definitive agreements on the main arms control issues, though he may be ready for a separate or interim agreement on INF. Rather he may calculate that the process of talking serves him better than any agreement likely to be on offer.

In that event, Gorbachev's purpose would be to spin out negotiations in the hope of being able to rely on a steadily mounting volume of pressure from Western public opinion to remove the "blockage" represented by the SDI, to give time for possible budget pressures to make your choices more difficult, and possibly to try to play the issue into the next United States Presidential elections. In other words he may conclude that his best hope of limiting or restricting SDI lies in sitting you out.

We also need to consider the wider context within which your negotiations will be taking place. When you launched the SDI, you set out the noble vision of a world without nuclear weapons. Gorbachev - and I think this is a good indicator of his shrewdness - has latched on to this and produced his spurious timetable of simple steps for achieving the goal by the end of the century. We both realise that for the most part his proposals are propaganda, although no less dangerous for that. In the real world, it's not going to happen like that.

Where it seems to me that Gorbachev's proposals are particularly dangerous is in the creation of unrealistic public expectations. The search for a world without nuclear weapons holds far more problems for the West than for the Soviet Union. Such a world would be a very risky place indeed unless there were concurrent steps to reduce the massive imbalance in the Soviet Union's favour in conventional forces.

In particular, Western Europe would be very much more vulnerable. There are the risks of further nuclear proliferation in the next few years, and we have to recognise that, while nuclear weapons themselves might in theory be abolished, the knowledge of how to make them never will be. But the risk lies above all in undermining public support for our agreed strategy of deterrence and flexible response. This remains the key to our security now and for a considerable period ahead; and in the face of the dangerous simplifications of Gorbachev's propaganda we need to reaffirm our determination to seek enhanced stability at lower levels of forces, conventional as well as nuclear.

Against this background, the crucial choice which you have to make is how to deal with Soviet insistence that there can be no serious progress towards reductions in strategic nuclear weapons unless you abandon the SDI. You and I are agreed that SDI must be pursued. But there remains the need to meet genuine Soviet anxieties as well as Soviet propaganda and to show that we continue to seek a stable international environment.

One option is to decline steadfastly to add to current United States statements on the SDI, its relationship with the ABM Treaty and your intentions for future developments beyond those which you have already made and which were incorporated in the Camp David Four Points. You would continue to offer the Soviet Union a dialogue on moving from reliance on offensive nuclear weapons to greater dependence on strategic defence. You would no doubt keep open your offer to share the technology with the Soviet Union, though personally I fear that it will be very hard to bring the Soviet Union to give this offer much weight. The risk of this approach is that it would be relatively easy for the Soviet Union to cast the United States in the role of obstructing progress towards reductions in offensive nuclear weapons. This in turn would lead to steadily mounting pressures, in Europe at least, upon the United States to modify its position.

Another option is one which I mentioned in the note which I left with you in New York at the end of October last year. In effect you would offer the Soviet Union a greater sense of reassurance about the likely shape, scope and timescale of possible development of the SDI. You would propose a framework which would allow reductions in offensive weapons to take place over a measured period against a forecast of future defensive developments. Because of the inherent difficulty of predicting what those defensive developments will be, the constraints on them would be expressed in terms of what the United States and the Soviet Union would not do by a certain date rather than by what it would do. As I suggested at the time it could be achieved by a mixture of strengthening and further refining the ABM Treaty, extending the period of notice required for unilateral withdrawal from it and a commitment not to enter particular phases of defensive programmes before certain specified dates.

I continue to believe that this second option offers the most promising prospect. It emphatically does not make the SDI as such negotiable. It would not restrict research which we both know to be essential and on which constraints anyway cannot be verified. There would be no Soviet veto. But the Russians would have reassurance against a sudden and unforeseen "break-out" in this area. This option should enable you to press for major cuts in offensive nuclear weapons and thus to find out for sure whether, despite all the obvious propaganda in Gorbachev's latest proposals, there is any real willingness in Moscow to make progress on arms control. That is what we need to find out in order to exploit his proposals in our interests. That is how we can counter the probable wish on his part to spin out the negotiations in Geneva for some years. I also believe that a position on these lines would command wide public understanding in the West. I should very much like to know whether you see merit in it.

There are a number of other points relevant to your meeting with Gorbachev which I shall mention only briefly at this stage.

One is the importance of exposing and challenging the more dangerous elements in the recent Gorbachev proposals. I am particularly concerned about the proposed restrictions which would affect the United Kingdom and France: a freeze on third country nuclear systems and a ban on transfer of strategic and medium range missiles. These would be seriously damaging to our national and to Alliance security and must be rejected. I was very glad to hear from Paul Nitze that you had identified these points as major objections to the Gorbachev proposals. But I also have considerable misgivings about giving him any encouragement now to believe that our forces could later be brought into the process on any but the conditions we have specified ourselves. I trust that you will be able in your reply to avoid raising his expectations on that score.

A second point is the need to persuade Gorbachev to negotiate seriously in other arms control fields. As you know I am particularly concerned about chemical weapons where it seems to me that the Alliance is at the great disadvantage of having no credible response to a chemical attack other than nuclear retaliation. I hope that we can work closely together to overcome remaining differences on verification in the draft Treaty tabled by George Bush in 1984, so that we can have a strong and united Alliance negotiating position. The recent Western initiative also opens the prospect of making some progress on MBFR.

Thirdly there is the question of Treaty compliance. As you know I regarded your decision last June to continue to adhere to SAL restraints as an important act of statesmanship. I hope that you will feel able to maintain that position which earned the United States enormous respect. Continued

restraint will also be important in building public support for the US negotiating position in Geneva.

It was good of you to send Paul Nitze to brief me on your latest thinking. While I fully support the general approach of your proposed reply to Gorbachev's proposals, I have - as Paul Nitze will have told you - anxieties about your ideas on INF. The zero-zero option is of course consistent with our previous public statements but it still presents problems of consistency with the decision to deploy Pershing II and Cruise missiles as an essential part of the Alliance's spectrum of nuclear deterrence. My own preference would still be for the sort of interim agreement which you proposed last November. Geoffrey Howe will let George Shultz have a more detailed note amplifying this and other points and I hope that our experts can stay closely in touch on this as well as on the wider issues.

Warm regards,

Y
Lansman

Rogers

The President of the United States of America.