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Perry Cradock

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

27 February 1986

PRIME MINISTER'S  
PERSONAL MESSAGE  
SERIAL No. T41/86

Dear Mr. Gorbachev.

Thank you for your letter of 14 January explaining your latest arms control proposals. I have considered them with great care and discussed them with our closest allies. I have also studied your remarks on the subject in your speech to the Twenty-Seventh Party Congress.

Every sensible person would like to see a world in which armaments on the scale which both East and West at present maintain were no longer necessary. But such a world will not be achieved unless we can create a climate of confidence between East and West which sadly eludes us at present. I know that both you and President Reagan have embraced the goal of freeing the world of nuclear weapons. But this is a long-term aspiration, and simply to set down an arbitrary time-table for achieving it is not in my view a practical approach. We need to tackle the causes of the insecurity which make nuclear weapons necessary. As I said to you when you visited the United Kingdom - a visit which we remember with pleasure - nuclear weapons at present make an essential contribution to preserving peace and stability. I am convinced that both East and West will continue to rely on them in their deterrent role for the foreseeable future.

To acknowledge that nuclear weapons will continue to be needed is no reason why they cannot be reduced. Such reductions must make both sides feel more, not less, secure.

SLW

If that security is to be found at lower levels of armament, then we need to focus on realistic arms control measures across the board which are both balanced and verifiable. It seems to me that a number of quite detailed proposals are on the table which now need to be the subject of thorough negotiation:

- On strategic weapons, both you and President Reagan agreed at your meeting in Geneva to work for 50% reductions. The United States tabled detailed proposals on 1 November for applying such reductions. I should like to see the Soviet Union respond constructively and in detail to these proposals at the expert, negotiating level.
- As regards space and strategic defence, the four points upon which I agreed with President Reagan at Camp David on 22 December 1984 seem to me to offer a good basis on which to proceed. Since research activities are not prohibited under the ABM Treaty and a ban on laboratory research could not in any case be verified, it is fruitless to make renunciation of research activities a pre-condition for reductions in strategic weapons. The way forward must surely lie through steps to strengthen the effectiveness of the ABM Treaty. I was surprised that your letter did not refer to this Treaty which is surely a fundamental achievement of arms control.
- As to INF, President Reagan's recent response to your proposals was discussed with us and has our full support. The conditions which you specify are, as they relate to British forces, unreasonable and unacceptable. The British deterrent force is a minimum one, and I spelled out in my letter of 7 November to you the only conditions on which we would be prepared to consider reductions in it.

Greater stability and security will not be achieved without parallel steps to correct the imbalance in conventional forces, and without widening the scope of East/West discussions to deal with regional, bilateral and human rights issues.

We need early progress in the MBFR talks in Vienna, in the negotiations on chemical weapons, and at the Stockholm Conference on Disarmament in Europe. In all these negotiations, adequate provisions for verification will be an essential part of any agreements. I was glad that your letter recognised the central importance of verification. And I hope that your reference to on-site inspection in connection with chemical weapons will be followed up with more detailed proposals. As you know, Britain holds the chairmanship of the Ad Hoc Group on Chemical Weapons at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva in 1986. We shall do everything possible to encourage real progress towards an agreement to control chemical weapons. I have to say, however, that the recent Eastern response to the West's novel proposals at the MBFR talks in Vienna was disappointing. Verification also remains the key to progress towards a comprehensive ban on nuclear testing, and further work is required on this before resumption of the tripartite negotiations which you propose would be worth while.

These issues should all feature largely on the agenda for the visit which I hope Mr. Shevardnadze will soon pay us, and I look forward to discussing them with him - and in due course with you.

*Kind regards.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Raymond Deliber*

Mr. Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev