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18/3FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARYARMS CONTROL: PRESIDENT REAGAN'S MESSAGE

I read with interest President Reagan's message to the Prime Minister about his response to Mr Gorbachev. I was glad to see how far the President has moved to take account of the concerns which we and other allies expressed during the recent consultations. There are nevertheless three points on which I believe we will need to keep a particularly close eye.

2. First deployment of Soviet LRINF missiles outside Europe, unmatched by US LRINF deployment in Europe, would carry risks: it would undoubtedly be much easier both militarily and politically for the Soviet Union to move its SS20s back West of Novosibirsk to where they could threaten virtually the whole of Western Europe than it would be for a US Government in a period of tension to rebase its missiles in Europe. For this reason a global zero option, though posing significant security problems in itself, would be far preferable to a European zero option. The President's proposal constitutes a welcome shift away from a European zero outcome, but the President's plan retains, by



implication rather than clear statement, the concept of a zone between Europe and Asia in which the USSR might retain some LRINF after LRINF had been withdrawn from Europe. This concept leaves me still uneasy.

3. I am particularly glad to see that the President stipulates that there must be constraints on SRINF. I am convinced that we must have appropriate constraints in this area which would allow NATO broadly to match Warsaw Pact capabilities and, depending on the LRINF outcome, to meet our deterrence needs. We could not permit a situation to arise in which the Russians, following an INF agreement, could simply retarget a high proportion of their current SS20 targets in the NATO rear areas with their shorter-range land-based ballistic systems such as SS12/22 and SS23. We are giving further consideration to the issue of collateral constraints on SRINF systems, on which John Stanley will be in touch with Tim Renton.

4. Lastly, the President's retention of the "interim proposal" for 140 launchers on each side in Europe is much to be welcomed, and I hope that it will remain on the table irrespective of whether or not the Soviets accept in principle the later stages of President Reagan's plan. In defence terms a limit at that level makes a great deal more sense than zero, even if all three pre-conditions attaching to the zero option are met.



5. I am copying this minute to the Prime Minister and to the Secretary of the Cabinet.

C.Y.

Ministry of Defence

18th March 1986

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