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26/3.FCS/86/081SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCEArms Control: President Reagan's Message

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1. I agree that the issues addressed in your minute of 18 March are important and that we ought to work out agreed views for discussion with the US and other Allies.
 2. I would share your unease at any prospect of US withdrawal of all LRINF missiles from Europe, while allowing the Soviet Union to retain substantial numbers of equivalent missiles in Soviet Asia. A global zero-zero solution, to which the Alliance has been committed since 1982, would be much preferable, even though it also has its drawbacks.
 3. The US hints that the Soviet Union might retain some missiles in a central "swing zone" are clearly intended both to make an otherwise unequal proposal potentially negotiable and to take account of the Soviet LRINF needs against China. I agree that this is an aspect of the INF negotiation we shall want to keep very closely under review. In the earlier phases of the three stage US process towards zero-zero it would be important to ensure that the Americans retained some LRINF systems in the US and that they had plans to return them to Europe in case of need.

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4. The Alliance will need to prepare its position on SRINF carefully if the Russians show any interest in negotiating seriously. It will be essential to avoid circumvention of an LRINF agreement. But to emphasise shorter range systems to the point of rendering an agreement on LRINF un-negotiable would in my view be unnecessary, as well as very difficult to manage politically.

5. The US "interim proposal" of last November has considerable attractions. While making our views plain to the Americans, as the Prime Minister and I did last month, we must avoid giving the impression that we are reneging on our public support for a global zero-zero solution. Nor should we forget that the Russians will be well aware from the press reports on the Nizte/Rowny missions to Europe and Japan in February that the US would have been prepared to settle for zero-zero in Europe and 50% reductions in Soviet systems in Asia. Knowing the US bottom-line, they are unlikely to feel under much pressure to accept reduction to 140 launchers in Europe with proportionate cuts in Soviet Asia. One more politically manageable way of reconciling our public support for zero-zero with our preference for the US "interim proposal" would be to continue to support the latest US proposals overall, but to emphasise the first step, which bears many similarities to the interim proposal. The timetable the US have put forward is unlikely to be met. An outcome in which phase one was activated but subsequent stages were slowed down is conceivable.



6. I should also like to make a more general point. In examining the zero option and issues such as SRINF, I believe that we should keep the focus of our attention on whether the arms control approaches under discussion leave us with adequate force structures, in relation to the Soviet threat, to fulfil our overall objective of deterrence and flexible response. This does not necessarily mean equilibrium in every category of weapons, nor that there is an immutable target set on the Warsaw Pact side which NATO must have sufficient systems to strike. As I have said, these are issues that require early study within the Alliance, possibly in the High Level Group.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'G. Howe', with a stylized flourish at the end.

(GEOFFREY HOWE)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
26 March 1986

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