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23/7

PRIME MINISTER

ARMS CONTROL DISCUSSION WITH MR. NITZE

You are to have a few minutes after dinner with Mr. Nitze to discuss the President's recent message on arms control. There will be no time to get into great detail. But he will have a full session with Tim Renton tomorrow morning.

Many of the proposals in the President's letter can be welcomed. For instance, he has picked up your suggestion of an agreed commitment not to enter particular phases of space defence programmes before certain specific dates. And he explicitly accepts that deployment of a space defence system would require negotiations under the ABM Treaty. The sections on INF - where he envisages an interim approach - and nuclear testing are also satisfactory. We hope therefore to be in a position to support the President's proposals IF .....

and here we come to the biggest problem with his proposals: if he deletes the reference to other nuclear powers participating in arms control negotiations once a 50 per cent reduction in US and Soviet strategic nuclear weapons has been achieved. This is simply not consistent with our long established position. We have always made clear that we have two conditions for a possible UK contribution to nuclear arms control: deep cuts in super power nuclear weapons and no significant increase in Soviet defensive capabilities. These conditions are not met in the President's proposals. We cannot be taken for granted in this way (to which Nitze is particularly prone) and shall not be able to give unqualified support to the US proposals unless this reference is deleted.

There are three other problems which you might mention - and Mr. Renton can explore more fully -

i) there is no reference in the President's proposals to the Soviet requirement for refining the ABM Treaty and clarifying ambiguities. This was one of the proposals which you put to



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the President and it seems hard to believe that the Russians will accept a package which does not provide for it.

ii) the reference in the American proposals to a "programme of research, and the development and associated testing, which is permitted by the ABM Treaty" suggests that the Americans are moving towards a broader interpretation of that Treaty. We would prefer them to stick to a more restrictive interpretation.

iii) The Americans are reducing the objective in START from 50 per cent to a 30 per cent cut. For presentational reasons at least, this is a pity, though the Americans are of course better placed than are we to judge what is negotiable.

C.D.P.

C.D. POWELL  
22 July 1986

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