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bc: PC

SUBJECT cc MASTER

10 DOWNING STREET
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From the Private Secretary

3 November 1986

Dear Tony,

ARMS CONTROL

The Prime Minister held a meeting this evening to consider the approach which she should take in her forthcoming discussions with President Reagan on arms control. The Lord President, Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Defence Secretary, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Mr. Stanley, Mr. Renton, Sir Robert Armstrong, the Chief of the Defence Staff and Sir Percy Cradock were present.

In discussion it was recognised that some of the proposals put forward in Reykjavik and now on the table in the arms control negotiations in Geneva had serious disadvantages for the European members of the Alliance. The principal difficulty arose with the proposal to eliminate strategic ballistic missiles within a time-span of ten years. But an agreement on zero-zero INF in Europe would also be far from ideal although it would be difficult for us to back away from it. Insufficient thought appeared to have been given by the United States Administration to the consequences of these proposals for Europe in the light of its far greater vulnerability to conventional attack. The notion that the conventional imbalance could be corrected by increased defence spending in Europe was fanciful. The more likely consequence of the United States proposals, were they ever to be agreed, was the progressive "findlandization" of Western Europe. The United States proposals could also, if pursued to their conclusion, put in doubt the future of Trident as the basis for the United Kingdom's independent nuclear deterrent. Cruise was not a viable alternative for the United Kingdom, on cost and other grounds. It was hard to understand why senior United States officials had gone along with proposals so incalculable in their effects. Or why they were suddenly prepared to argue that deterrence could be achieved on the basis of air-breathing missiles and bombers alone. The motives were probably a mixture of loyalty to the President and a belief that the Russians would never in practice agree to elimination of ballistic missiles.

Looking to the Camp David meeting, it was recognised that the worst outcome would be open disagreement between the Prime Minister and the President. The aim should therefore be to

bring the President to recognise the potentially damaging consequences of the proposed elimination of ballistic missiles in terms of dividing Europe from the United States, weakening the Alliance and damaging the position of governments which supported strong defences and had proved loyal allies of the United States. We should therefore try to secure his public endorsement of a number of crucial points, in particular the linkage between reductions in strategic nuclear weapons and action to correct the conventional imbalance, a reaffirmation of the importance of deterrence and confirmation of the arrangements for UK Trident. We should lay particular stress on the impossibility of treating nuclear weapons in isolation and on the importance of the leverage provided by ballistic missiles (paragraphs 13 and 19 of the paper attached to the Foreign Secretary's minute of 29 October), but should avoid arguments relating to Trident (paragraph 16) which might be damaging if they were leaked. With the President it would be best to concentrate on a few key political points.

The Prime Minister concluded that the principal arguments which she should use with the President should be marshalled in a speaking note. This should deal only with the really crucial points identified in discussion. Other issues should be covered in a separate note, and should include arguments to rebut points deployed since the Reykjavik meeting by Administration spokesmen (the scope for increased European spending on conventional defence, the notion that non-ballistic missiles would be sufficient to carry deterrence, the 'insurance policy' justification for SDI and the suggestion made to Chancellor Kohl for a high-level discussion with key allies of the strategic issues emerging from Reykjavik). She would also require a background technical brief to deal with claims that Cruise missiles were an adequate substitute for ballistic missiles (and any suggestion that they might be supplied to the United Kingdom in place of Trident). Meanwhile the Foreign Secretary would go over the ground with Secretary Shultz in Vienna, and the Chiefs of Staff should bring to the attention of the American Joint Chiefs the various arguments against basing deterrence solely on Cruise missiles which had been instrumental in our own decision to acquire Trident.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to the Lord President, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Defence Secretary, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, to Sir Robert Armstrong and to the Chief of the Defence Staff.

yours sincerely,
Charles Powell
Charles Powell

A. C. Galsworthy, Esq., C.M.G.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.