



Prime Minister

Agree that

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

(a) text of letter to you from
Bryghman can be released to NATO

London SW1A 2AH

(b) Drafting of reply should follow
consultations with Allies, particularly
US + FRG. ?

29 August 1980

Dear Sir,

RMA 1/9

Yes

no

Theatre Nuclear Forces : President Brezhnev's Letter

In the course of last weekend your Duty Clerk passed to us the text of President Brezhnev's letter of 21 August to the Prime Minister on theatre nuclear forces (TNF) arms control, and you wrote to Chris Jebb about the matter on 20 August. The letter repeats the latest Soviet position, first spelled out to Chancellor Schmidt during his visit to Moscow on 1 July, ie that the Russians are willing to negotiate on medium range missiles provided American forward-based systems are included (although the Russians have been ambiguous in defining precisely what they mean by such systems). President Brezhnev says that he is sending a letter to President Carter proposing 'without further delay' the start of official talks.

You subsequently agreed that the text of this letter could be passed to the Americans and the Germans. We have now heard from our NATO delegation that most other allies have now received similar letters and there is a proposal to compare the texts of these in NATO. The Germans and the Americans have already circulated summaries of these letters and the former have undertaken to circulate the full text if others do likewise. As one of our major objectives throughout discussions on TNF has been to maintain a united NATO position both on TNF modernisation and arms control, we would welcome this. It would also ensure that opportunities for Soviet wedge-driving tactics are kept to a minimum. I would, therefore, be grateful for your authority to release to our NATO allies a summary of the text (or the full text if others are doing likewise) of the letter to Mrs Thatcher.

In passing a copy of the letter to the FCO, No 10 Duty Clerk asked our Resident Clerk whether he could arrange for a draft reply to reach No 10 this week. In light of the need to consult our allies we would see disadvantages in replying too hastily. We will certainly need to know how the Americans respond before drafting any substantial reply. It has been agreed in NATO (and it is indeed a strong British interest) that the negotiations should be bilateral; the Americans must therefore remain the formal channel of communications with the Russians on matters of substance. We are already in touch with the Americans and the Germans about the timing and contents of any response and there are likely to be further discussions in the alliance

/when

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when the texts have been compared. Our recommendation is, therefore, that we should only consider the text of a substantive reply from the Prime Minister after these consultations.

The substance of the message adds nothing to the position which President Brezhnev expounded to Chancellor Schmidt. Nor does it clarify the ambiguities in that position. The reason for the messages is probably propagandistic, the Russians seeking to bolster an image of sweet reason in nuclear arms control following the Brezhnev-Schmidt Summit and to foster as far as possible divergencies of view in the Alliance.

The existence of the Brezhnev letters has leaked. Our News Department is confirming that Mrs Thatcher has received a letter from President Brezhnev, adding if necessary that we cannot comment further on substance, and that we are consulting our allies about this development.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Brian Norbury in the Ministry of Defence, and to David Wright in the Cabinet Office.

*For Mr
GGH*

(G G H Walden)
Private Secretary

- 1 SEP 1980

