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Prime Minister

CDP 13/7.

CDP
16/7.

B.06798

PRIME MINISTER

c Sir Robert Armstrong

Anti-Satellite Systems and Arms Control
Meeting of Ministers: 16 July at 5 p.m.

BACKGROUND

FLAG C

The joint minute to you of 19 June by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and Defence Secretary covers a paper by officials which discusses the military advantages and disadvantages to the West of the development of anti-satellite systems (ASATS) and the implications of activities in this field for arms control. The main points to emerge from the paper are summarised in paragraph 2 of the joint minute.

2. As to the practical action to be taken, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and Defence Secretary recommend (paragraph 6) that the Americans should be encouraged, in formulating their policy on ASATS and arms control, to adopt an approach which would place limits on low altitude ASATS and ban the testing, and therefore deployment, of high altitude ASATS. The judgement is that for military reasons, and because of problems of verification, the political market in the United States would not bear the adoption of a policy calling for a complete ban on all ASATS.

3. Since the joint minute was written, the United States have said that they are prepared to discuss with the Soviet Union approaches to arms control in space, including ASATS;



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they would also like to raise at any talks other arms control issues, including nuclear missile reductions. The Soviet response has been that there must be formal agreement upon an Agenda before any talks can take place, and that missile reductions cannot be included. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary is sending you further advice, in advance of your meeting, describing the latest position in these exchanges.

HANDLING

4. You should invite the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to introduce the discussion. The essential point to establish is whether the meeting is agreed that the West has more to gain from assuring an ASAT arms control regime than the Russians, and that the Americans should therefore be encouraged to go down this road. Other points which might be covered are -

(a) If the West clearly stands to gain more from an ASAT arms control regime (because of its greater dependence on, and competence in, intelligence gathering by satellite), why are the Russians pushing the idea? Is it purely for propaganda purposes without the serious intention of reaching agreement? Or do they genuinely want one, perhaps regarding this as a technological competition which they cannot win? The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary might be invited to comment.

(b) Is the development of an American low-level ASAT system sufficiently advanced to allow the United States to respond positively to a Soviet offer to negotiate a ban on all ASATS? Or will they have to spin matters out until their new system is operational? Will the Russians, in that case, feel impelled to improve on their own very rudimentary low-level system? The Defence Secretary might be invited to comment.



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(c) Is the approach to the Americans suggested at Annex B to the paper by officials along the right lines? More generally, should the opportunity be taken to encourage the Americans to take their closer European Allies more into their confidence as their thinking develops on the subject?

(d) The Americans, particularly the Pentagon, may fear that an arms control regime on ASATS might hamper the eventual development of ballistic missile defence (BMD) as part of the President's Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI). Ministers will be invited to consider the SDI in detail at a later date, but a preliminary view is that an American move towards BMD which encouraged the Russians to develop a similar system would have serious implications for the credibility of the British national deterrent. Do Ministers agree that prima facie and irrespective of the intrinsic merits or demerits of BMD (which will be considered separately in a further paper by officials), this is a further reason for seeking to influence the Americans in favour of ASAT arms control?

CONCLUSION

5. Subject to the points made in discussion, you could guide the Meeting to endorse the proposed approach to the Americans set out in paragraph 6 of the joint minute by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and Defence Secretary, and developed in detail in Annex B to the paper attached to that minute.

B G Cartledge

13 July 1984