



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

17 December 1981

Prime Minister*Dear John,**AM 11.12*Message from the Pope about Nuclear Weapons

I enclose a brief for the call on the Prime Minister by a delegation from the Pontifical Academy of Sciences at 2.15 pm on Friday 18 December.

It now appears certain that the Papal Delegation will be received by Presidents Brezhnev, Mitterrand and Reagan. As far as we are aware, there has been no mention of a visit to Peking, but the UN Secretary-General may also receive the Delegation.

The Pope has referred publicly to his message. We therefore have to consider how to handle publicity. The Soviet Union will probably play the matter up and try to imply that the Pope's initiative supports their own proposal for an International Committee of Scientists to study the dangers of nuclear war. If HMG make no public comment, there may well be questions in Parliament. Your press office may therefore wish to issue a statement on the lines of the attached draft.

yours ever
Roderic Lyne

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Private Secretary

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DRAFT PRESS STATEMENT

The Prime Minister this afternoon received a delegation sent by the Pope and headed by Professor Carlos Chagas, President of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. The delegation delivered a message from the Pope addressed to the Queen about the consequences of nuclear war.

The Prime Minister took the opportunity to emphasise that HM Government shares the Pope's concern about the effects of nuclear war. She pointed out that HMG's defence policy was devoted to the prevention of war, both conventional and nuclear, and that in HMG's view the prospect of nuclear war is remote precisely because this strategy of deterrence is working effectively. The Prime Minister went on to emphasise NATO's commitment to reductions in nuclear arsenals by negotiation. She drew attention in this context to the talks currently taking place on Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces in Geneva and the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) due to begin in the Spring.

CALL BY PAPAL DELEGATION ON THE PRIME MINISTER, DECEMBER 1981

Points to Make

1. Appreciate the Pope's thoughtfulness in sending a message to world leaders about nuclear weapons. Customary in Britain for political matters to be dealt with by Head of Government rather than The Queen. We shall study the message carefully and give Her Majesty our advice on its contents.
2. HMG fully share scientific concern about horrific consequences of nuclear ^{war} ~~war~~ for the whole of mankind. This has been the subject of authoritative studies by UN Secretary-General. Similar reports on nuclear weapons have been issued by HMG and by an international conference of physicians.
3. In the UK there is full and open debate about nuclear weapons, the dangers they pose, and the need to prevent their use. Prevention of war has highest priority in our policy. Our possession of nuclear weapons is precisely to prevent their use. Despite level of public concern we believe the prospect of nuclear war is remote. Deterrence remains effective in spite of increasing international tensions.
4. Peace and security depends on maintaining military balance between East and West. But essential to reduce high level of super-power armaments. HMG fully support US position of zero level on both sides in current negotiations with USSR on intermediate-range nuclear forces. Agreement on this would open

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way for reductions in other theatre nuclear systems, eg aircraft. We also welcome US proposal for Strategic Arms Reduction Talks - START - next spring, and hope Soviet Union will respond in same spirit.

5. Preoccupation with nuclear weapons should not blind us to the fact that there is a far more immediate danger to human life from use of conventional weapons throughout the world. Over 120 conventional wars since 1945 have produced millions of casualties and untold suffering. Hence we supported Danish proposal for UN study on all aspects of conventional arms, just adopted by the General Assembly.

Essential Facts

6. The Pope's idea of sending a message to world leaders on the use of nuclear weapons comes uncomfortably close to President Brezhnev's proposal, made at the 26th Congress of the Central Committee of the CPSU in February 1981, that an international committee of scientists should be appointed to study the dangers of nuclear war. The purpose of the Soviet proposal is probably to exploit the world-wide fear of nuclear war and to foster the belief that US nuclear policies render it more likely. A particular aim would be to appeal to anti-nuclear sentiments in Western Europe and to stimulate further opposition to NATO's TNF modernisation plans. We may therefore expect the Russians to give a warm welcome to the Pope's message and to use it in support of their own propaganda.

7. We believe the appalling consequences of nuclear war are well understood by the world community. They were the subject of a comprehensive study by the UN Secretary-General in 1968. As recently as September 1980 the Secretary-General published a report on all aspects of nuclear weapons which included the most up-to-date information on this subject. Similar reports have been issued by the US and British Governments ('Nuclear Weapons', HMSO, 1980), and by an international conference of physicians.

8. In our view, there is no basis for statements about the growing danger of nuclear war. The Pugwash Conference of international scientists in December 1980 concluded that, whereas the devastating effects of nuclear weapons had increased considerably, the likelihood of nuclear war had not. The two factors are clearly related. Most experts agree that we are not on the brink of nuclear war.

9. We believe the attention of the world's religious leaders should be concentrated on efforts to reduce the numbers of nuclear weapons while preserving deterrence. President Reagan's statement of 18 November, the opening of the INF negotiations in Geneva, and the prospect of Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) in 1982, show that there is a rational way to end the nuclear arms race. We hope the Soviet Union will grasp the opportunities which have been offered.

10. The Papal Delegation is headed by the President of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Professor Carlos Chagas. He will

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be accompanied by two eminent Cambridge scientists who are Nobel laureates - Professor Max Perutz (chemistry) and Sir Martin Ryle (physics) - and by Professor Hermann Bruck (Astronomer-Royal for Scotland) and Professor Stanley Runcorn (Institute of Physics at Newcastle University). Sir M Ryle is a unilateralist; we do not know the views of the others.