

US scraps subs for Salt treaty

From Michael Binyon
Washington

President Reagan has decided to scrap two ageing Poseidon submarines, but has warned Moscow he will no longer abide by the limit of the Salt 2 treaty if the Russians continue to violate it.

A White House announcement yesterday said the US could not continue unilaterally to support a flawed Salt structure that Soviet non-compliance had "so grievously undermined" and Moscow appeared unwilling to repair.

The submarines had to be decommissioned because of the sea trials of USS Nevada, a Trident submarine with 24 multiple warhead missiles, beginning today. If the Poseidons had continued in service, the new submarine would have pushed the US over the Salt 2 limit of 1,200 launchers.

The White House noted that the US would remain "in technical observance" of the treaty for some months, giving Moscow time to correct its violations.

Meanwhile, Mr Reagan has proposed the building of a new arms limitation structure based on "significant equitable and verifiable" reductions in existing US and Soviet nuclear arsenals.

The President's carefully worded statement increases the pressure on the Russians

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while leaving the door open to continued US compliance.

● Britain yesterday welcomed Mr Reagan's decision to adhere to the Salt 2 treaty, expressing the hope that the Soviet Union would improve its compliance record so that Salt 2 could continue in force beyond the end of this year (Nicholas Ashford writes).

A statement issued by the Foreign Office said Britain hoped Mr Reagan would not feel compelled to break the treaty limits when more cruise missile-carrying B52 bombers become operational in December because of continued Soviet violations of the existing arms control treaties.

"We would very much regret it if the provisional decision by President Reagan (to exceed the Salt 2 limits) had to be implemented," the statement said.

Mrs Thatcher has been a

firm believer of the need to adhere to the Salt 2 accord, which, along with the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty, is seen in Whitehall as one of the major achievements of the arms control process in recent years.

The Prime Minister made clear her views about the desirability of adhering to the treaty when Mr Paul Nitze, Mr Reagan's special arms control adviser, visited London last month.

Mrs Thatcher's views are shared by the US's other Nato allies in Europe.

Britain shares US concern about Soviet non-compliance and has frequently said so. In the message which Mrs Thatcher sent to Mr Gorbachov, the Soviet leader, with Lord Whitelaw this week, she again emphasized the need for strict compliance with the accord.