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file SKW 26

meeting record

SUBJECT CC MASTER



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(HM Embassy
Washington)

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13 October 1986

From the Private Secretary

Dear Coln.

PRIME MINISTER'S TALK WITH PRESIDENT REAGAN

President Reagan telephoned the Prime Minister this evening to discuss the outcome of the Reykjavik meeting.

The President said that he and Mr. Gorbachev had discussed the whole range of current issues between the United States and the Soviet Union, including human rights, regional problems and bilateral issues. But Gorbachev had made no secret of his desire to focus as much as possible on arms control. The first day's sessions had been largely fruitless ("we went on hassling all day with no takers"). But he and Gorbachev had agreed to turn over their notes to officials, to see whether any agreements could be defined.

Amplifying this general picture, the President said that INF had appeared not to present major difficulties. He had made clear that the United States could not accept the inclusion of British and French nuclear forces in the INF negotiations and Gorbachev had come to accept this. The President stressed that he had also insisted that limits on INF must apply globally.

The President continued that the major difficulty had arisen over SDI. He had made clear to Gorbachev from the outset that the United States was going to proceed with permitted research under the terms of the ABM Treaty. He acknowledged that there were differences of interpretation about what was and was not permitted by the Treaty. He had himself spoken to those who had taken part in negotiation of the Treaty. They had assured him that research and testing were allowed. He had pointed out to Gorbachev that the Soviet Union was not well placed to talk of the ABM Treaty as though it were the Ten Commandments since it was clearly acting in breach of the Treaty's provisions over Krasnoyarsk. Gorbachev had not attempted to rebut this.

The President said that, in recognition of Soviet concerns, he had put forward a radical proposal under which

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the United States would guarantee not to deploy a strategic defence system for ten years in return for an undertaking to eliminate all US and Soviet nuclear weapons over that same period. He had also offered a binding commitment to share a defence system with the Soviet Union, but Gorbachev seemed to doubt whether the United States would in the event live up to this. He had continued to demand unacceptable restrictions on SDI research and testing, tighter even than the present ABM Treaty required, and had allowed this demand to stand in the way of an agreement which would effectively have abolished nuclear weapons. The President added that he had made quite clear in advance of the Reykjavik meeting that he would not be prepared to renounce the SDI.

The Prime Minister said that she thought that the President had performed marvellously at Reykjavik. It was important to demonstrate clearly to public opinion in the West that the Soviet Union had been responsible for the deadlock by making agreement on any aspect of arms control dependent on acceptance of their conditions on SDI. This had been a major step backwards, reverting to a position which pre-dated the Geneva Summit. Indeed she was now inclined to wonder whether they had not deliberately set up the meeting in order to engineer a breakdown over strategic defence, in the hope that this would divide Europe from the United States. She had been gratified to hear that Secretary Shultz's briefing of NATO had been well received and that Alliance solidarity was being maintained. She hoped that the President would stress in his address to the American people the United States' willingness to continue negotiations on the areas where progress had been registered at Reykjavik. This would put the Soviet Union on the spot. If they turned their back on further discussions, they would have only themselves to blame.

The Prime Minister continued that the President's proposal for the elimination of all nuclear weapons within ten years caused her considerable concern. Given the great imbalance in conventional forces in Europe in the Soviet Union's favour, nuclear weapons would remain essential to our defence. It would be unsettling to opinion in Europe to speculate on the possibility of getting rid of nuclear weapons within a relatively short time-scale. She hoped that the President would not emphasise this aspect. The proposal which he had described would need careful examination within NATO. The President acknowledged the Prime Minister's concern but commented that the United States believed that the problem of the conventional imbalance could be managed. He thought that a strategy could be devised to meet the challenge. The Prime Minister repeated her view that it was important not to undermine public support for nuclear weapons as an essential element in the West's defences.

The Prime Minister said that she would welcome a fuller talk with the President soon. She understood that their officials were discussing a possible meeting on 15 November, which would allow them both to go over these issues in some detail. The President said that he had told his people that

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he very much wanted such a meeting.

This record is particularly sensitive and should be given only a very limited distribution.

I am copying this letter to John Howe (Ministry of Defence) and to Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "C. D. Powell". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the closing "Yours sincerely,".

(C. D. POWELL)

Colin Budd, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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