

PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AND
COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS TO THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
23 NOVEMBER 1979

Your Ambassador called on me this afternoon to tell me of the line which the Danish Government intends to take in the debate next week in your Parliament on Theatre Nuclear Force Modernisation. I appreciate the courtesy of this advance warning, particularly since your Government's line represents a considerable change in the position since we discussed Theatre Nuclear Force Modernisation last week. But I am bound to tell you that I would strongly regret it if you were no longer able to join in a positive decision by the alliance in December.

A decision in the Danish Parliament to advocate a postponement of six months is bound to make the hard decisions facing your allies even more difficult. This applies particularly to those countries which, unlike Denmark, are being asked to accept new US weapons systems on their territory.

In any case I see no advantage and substantial risks in the idea of a six months postponement. Not only will it delay the necessary congressional decisions on funding the new systems but it will push the decision into the period of the US and Federal German elections. Worse still, a postponement would cast doubt on NATO's ability to take difficult decisions and to meet its own much publicised targets in the face of Soviet pressure and propaganda. It is also bound to affect internal alliance relations and in particular relations between the United States and the European members.

Postponement would also, I believe, work to the serious detriment of arms control. If Western European allies are thought to lack the resolution to take the planned decision in December, it will harden the attitude of those in the American Congress who oppose ratification of SALT II and surely must diminish the chances that the Treaty will be ratified at all. Furthermore, the alliance will waste a unique opportunity, in parallel with Theatre Nuclear Force Modernisation, to seize the initiative on a number of arms control issues now under study in the alliance (including unilateral warhead reductions and two new proposals for the MBFR negotiations). There can be no question of reaching an agreement on these initiatives (which would constitute a coherent response to President Brezhnev's speech in Berlin on 6 October) if a decision on Theatre Nuclear Force Modernisation cannot be reached at our meeting in December.

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Furthermore, I see little possibility within six months of reaching any satisfactory arms control arrangement with the Soviet Union. Production and deployment of the SS 20 and the backfire bomber have already been built up to disturbing levels. Experience has taught that the chances of persuading the Russians to agree to stop their own production and deployment when the Western Allies are in a position of such inferiority are slim. And even if we were successful in this we would merely have frozen our present position of disadvantage, a position which will get worse as our own systems become either obsolescent or more vulnerable.

I urge you to give the most serious consideration to the points I have made.

