

CRITIQUE OF PM THATCHER'S 11 FEB LETTER

On 11 February, the Prime Minister sent a letter to the President on her views on how we should react to Gorbachev's 15 January arms control proposals. The letter is disturbing to us because of what some of us read between the lines in the flow of the argument on arms control, zero nuclear weapons as a goal, and SDI. The PM devotes the majority of the letter to making the following argument:

— Gorbachev's overriding purpose at the next summit will be to stop SDI because he fears unilateral US advantage, would prefer to avoid costs to counter, and wants to use this issue to split the alliance.

— Gorbachev does not want to walk away from negotiations because this cuts his leverage with western publics. However, he recognizes the President's commitment to SDI, so he may decide to sit the President out on this issue (to the elections if necessary) by promising progress at the price of SDI.

— Gorbachev has picked up on the President's vision of a nuclear free world announced when SDI was launched. He has offered a "plan" which is dangerous. Unless key conditions are met (reduction of Soviet conventional advantage, control of nuclear proliferation), a nuclear free world favors the East. However, the real risk in Gorbachev's picking up on this theme

[REDACTED]

— Therefore, to counter Gorbachev, we need to

[REDACTED]

[Note: This shifts the thrust of the response away from the goal of a nuclear free world, to reductions. This logically leads to the next point.]

— In this context, then,

[REDACTED]

[Note: This is a very interesting formulation. The PM argues that since we need to shift the focus to reductions (vice elimination), we must deal with SDI as a block to reductions in strategic nuclear weapons. This sudden narrowing, of course, allows her not to discuss the potential block that UK and French forces pose to INF reductions.]

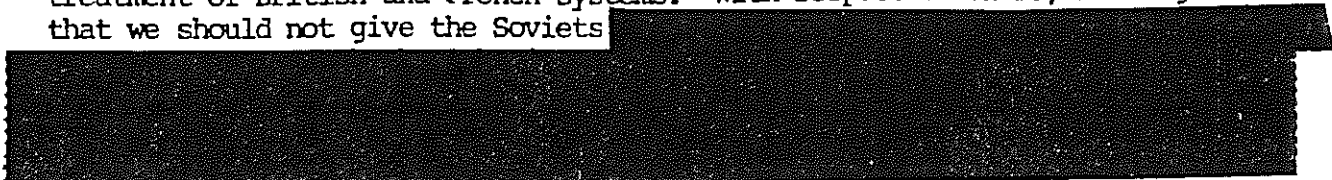
— Based on this logic, the PM offers two options: roughly the current US position, and an alternative which would extend and strengthen the AEM Treaty regime in return for offensive force reductions while technically permitting SDI research to continue. Her description of this is

[REDACTED]

— The PM ends her line of argument on this subject by expressing her support for this second option which, she believes: (a) does not make SDI as such negotiable; (b) would not restrict essential research; and (c) offers no Soviet veto.

Sec. 1.4(b)(1)
E.O. 13526
As Amended

— Following this, the PM turns to other subjects, including the treatment of British and French systems. With respect to these, she argues that we should not give the Soviets



The problem we have with all of the above is that, while sounding very consistent with the basic US thinking in many respects, it very well may not be consistent in its fundamentals. The key point lies in the first few elements of the argument.

— The PM proceeds from the view that a zero nuclear world is risky for the West and that the priority must be on not undercutting public support for current strategy — therefore, the Western emphasis must be on reductions (vice zero), and, therefore, to the extent that SDI is perceived as a blockage to this, we must find a way to not let it block reductions. The priority is on protecting public support for current strategy (and for the UK Trident program) by emphasizing reductions vice the end-goal and by avoiding having SDI perceived as a block to reductions by linking restrictions on SDI to research in return for reductions. In this context, SDI research increases leverage for reductions and serves as a prudent hedge against Soviet breakout. However, the linkage of restrictions on SDI to reductions in offensive forces places a priority on negotiated reductions vice movement to defenses as soon as our research criteria can be met. This is a key point.

— Our position is that SDI, not just the research but hopefully the future deployments, offer the best hope for our long-term national security (and that of our allies). It is essential due to the trends in Soviet offense and defense. It is needed whether reductions are negotiated or not. Our priority, therefore, is protecting the SDI research program, and US options once the research yields results that meet the criteria we have set.

When all the smoke clears, we may ultimately have to make some move in the general direction suggested by the PM. We have internally considered this same option. In fact, it is a bit worrisome that this is very close to the position Paul Nitze has been unsuccessfully pushing for some time now (linking ABM extension to reductions). However, the key question is whether you can sustain an SDI program under such conditions. So far, our answer has been no. And, therefore, since our priority is on SDI, we have not made such a move.

When you put all this into the full context of the letter, what the letter effectively says is that the British appreciate:

- US willingness to focus reductions (which they feel essential) only on US and Soviet systems — protecting UK systems;
- adopting their suggestions on MBFR (against our own best judgement);
and
- our move in the chemical weapons area (however, noting further motion on verification as originally suggested by the UK is still needed).

However, after offering this thanks, the PM advises that:

- the Soviets are trying to undercut the solidarity of the Alliance via both SDI and the UK/French forces issue, therefore we can't let SDI undercut support for our current strategy (since we can't be sure that the nuclear free world will ever be in the West's interest and it also adversely affects the UK Trident program);
- we still need to work out differences on verification of chemicals;
- and, we must continue with our current policy of interim restraint with respect to SALT. [Note: On this count, it is interesting to note the the majority of our problems with Soviet compliance, and certainly the most visible ones, are associated with the ABM Treaty — which the PM would have us extend.]

We would also underline the fact that this letter is in response to a specific request made by Secretary Shultz for her views on how to handle SDI at the next summit. Also, as mentioned earlier, there is a disturbing correlation between views offered by elements within our government and repeatedly rejected and the option now being proposed by the PM.

The PM's position is very understandable from the UK point of view. The bottom line, however, is that the option suggested by the PM does put the priority on achieving reductions in strategic forces and protecting the public support for current strategy (both elements related to the UK Trident issue). It does not maximize protection for achieving the promise of SDI, but rather protects the SDI research program as a lever for ensuring reductions and a hedge against Soviet breakout. The President's policy, however, does not share these priorities — it places the pursuit of the promise of SDI as a fundamental element of our long term strategy and essential to future national security — and we fear that even a viable SDI research program could not long survive in the context that would be provided by the PM's alternative.

This fundamental difference in view about the role of SDI is a problem within the Administration also.