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10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

16 May 1984

EAST-WEST RELATIONS

I did, in the end, show the Prime Minister your paper (your letter of 14 March). I did not expect her to welcome the idea, but I was quite sure that she would enjoy being stimulated by it. So it proved.

She has described your proposal as "unequal", going on to say that the Russians could return within 48 hours and that the threat of their return would still be present in every Eastern European country. By contrast, she believes, the Americans would never return to Europe once they had left. She fears that the proposal could lead to the Finlandisation of the whole of Europe.

But I have no doubt that she would welcome a talk about it all when she next sees you - and the opportunity will of course occur in the summer.

I shall be leaving here in mid-June. I have just been writing some hand-over notes - greatly aided by your own hand-over notes for me which I found on clearing out my desk. Time flies.

A. J. COLES

His Excellency Mr. M. O'D. B. Alexander, C.M.G.



BRITISH EMBASSY,  
VIENNA.

14 March, 1984

A J Coles Esq  
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*Dear John,*

EAST-WEST RELATIONS

1. When you and I talked with the Prime Minister last November, I mentioned in passing that I thought that efforts to change the present depressing scene in Europe would at some point necessitate reconsideration of the nature and scale of the American military presence here. What I had in mind is outlined in the attached paper. I drafted it some time ago and then pigen-holed it - mainly out of cowardice. Now that Messrs Kissinger and Schmidt have begun to make similar, if less radical, noises, I have dusted it off.

2. The paper, like the one I wrote last May and to which it is essentially a companion piece, is written in extremely simplistic terms. There are enough controversial and unsupported assertions in it (as well as omissions) to keep the IISS busy for the rest of the decade. But unless the issues are set out baldly, they rapidly disappear in the fog. The paper reflects conversations with journalists, academics, politicians and diplomats from East and West Europe. But the basic idea in it has been discussed with no one. I have never allowed it to appear that I might be thinking in these terms (at least I have not done so consciously).

3. I have not addressed the paper to the Prime Minister because I am uncertain whether or not you ought to show it to her. Clearly, and in contrast to my last effusion, its thesis would be unwelcome in the FCO and still more so in the MOD. I have not addressed myself to, say, Pauline Neville-Jones, partly because I do not particularly want to get the reputation of being a crank and partly, by the same token, because I doubt whether the paper would be taken seriously.

4. What you can judge far better than I is whether the concerns expressed in it and the suggested course of action come into the category of ideas which are "in the air" but not yet respectable,

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ow whether they are still in the realm of the lunatic. If the former, it might be worth showing the text to the Prime Minister for reading over Easter, with a covering note from Percy Cradock or yourself giving your views and explaining that the paper is a continuation of the last paper and of our talk together in the Autumn; if the latter, one had better write "BU in a couple of years" on it. In either case you may like to discuss the text with Percy.

5. I suppose the obvious criticism to make of the paper is that it fails to demonstrate that the dangers facing us in Europe are anything like sufficient to warrant stirring up the hornet's nest of controversy that would result from voicing such thoughts publicly. "Is the situation any more dangerous now than it was 10 years ago", "Why risk complicating things still more", etc. etc. This line of argument is difficult to counter. It is one reason why so few international initiatives which are genuinely innovatory ever get carried through except during and in the aftermath of wars.

6. I can only say that I am more and more struck by the fundamental instability of a situation in which, on the one hand, the West's unchallenged economic, technical and cultural predominance must be seen by the Soviet Government as an overhanging and ever-increasing menace; while, on the other hand, the collective inconstancy, disunity and unpredictability of the West's political leadership must appear in Moscow both as a temptation and a danger. The arms race, which on the Soviet side continued unabated throughout the period of detente, is in considerable measure explained by this lack of congruity in the positions of East and West. The arms race itself of course exacerbates the problem. (I leave aside the ideological, geopolitical, historical and other issues which serve to make things worse).

7. Putting things this way has a tendency to make the Soviet Union appear as a victim of the situation - which is obviously absurd. But insofar as the Soviet Union's acute sense of its (non-military) inferiority is arguably a prime source of trouble, it seems to me likely that initiatives to try to change matters will always have to come from our side (because initiatives to reduce the level of military confrontation will have an inherent tendency to accentuate the Soviet Union's disadvantage).

8. Neither the proposing nor the implementing of a mutual super power withdrawal from non-Soviet Europe would solve the basic problem. But either would change the terms of the equation in a

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way which no other initiative that I can think of would seem to do. Given the long lead times and the chance that our hands will be forced in the interim by some unforeseen event, my instinct is that the window for voluntary action will not remain open indefinitely.

9. I recognise that if next week's European Council is a failure, everyone's minds will be elsewhere for weeks to come; and that if it succeeds there could be a tendency to think that all our troubles are over. As seen from Vienna (and no doubt from Washington and Moscow) the outcome of the Community's travails is of vital importance as an indication of the organisation's future viability and of its members sense of priorities. But in themselves the questions at issue have no great significance or relevance to those in the wider world. The evolution of other more fundamental crises in Europe and beyond is not determined by the Community's timetable (nor by M. Rocard's constituents). So I thought I might as well write now - preoccupied though you must be.

*Yours ever*

*Michael*

(M O'D B Alexander)

Enc.

PS Since drafting the above, I have seen an account of the Prime Minister's recent speech to MEP's: "seizing the initiative on world problems, not reacting wearily to them; forging political links across the European divide and so creating a more hopeful relationship between East and West". I can only say: Amen!



## THE EAST-WEST CONFRONTATION IN EUROPE: THE CASE FOR AN INITIATIVE

The Problem

1. In more than one speech in late 1979 and early 1980 the Prime Minister referred to the '80s as "the dangerous decade". The description seems as valid now as four and a half years ago.

2. The problems of the Soviet bloc and the factors making for a continuing deterioration in East-West relations were summarised in a paper written last May. Events in the interim have been not inconsistent with the paper's main thesis.

3. The several advantages which the democratic capitalist countries enjoy relative to the Soviet bloc remain as marked as ever. But the West of course has weaknesses. These, particularly in Western Europe, continue to prevent us from either realising or deploying our strengths fully. The European Community is mired in internal squabbles. Many of the younger generation are disillusioned with the political process. Western Europe is falling behind "Jamerica" economically (the fact that the COMECON countries are falling behind a great deal more rapidly is no consolation). Transatlantic relations are showing signs of strain. The accumulation of armaments continues unabated. The overseas rôle of Western governments is largely confined to poorly co-ordinated fire fighting - too often in areas which must be taken seriously but which are of essentially secondary importance to the governments not immediately involved.

4. A fresh approach to the central East-West confrontation, that in Europe, is needed. The region may appear calm. But it is the calm in the eye of the storm. If the evident tensions and disparities in Europe get out of hand, the conflagration will be uncontrollable. Nor should the relative calm be seen as a reason for inaction: it may be a final opportunity.

5. There is a longing among Europeans, particularly the young, for a new and imaginative strategy, preferably one originating somewhere other than Washington. This is not in itself a reason for attempting to break fresh ground. But it does mean that a different approach, provided it was soundly based, would be widely welcomed.

6. The opening for an initiative, if it were agreed that an initiative was desirable and feasible, might come in the first half of 1985. President Reagan will have been re-elected or his successor will have taken office. The new Soviet Government will

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have had a year in power - though one may doubt whether the arguments between the old generation and the new will have been resolved. The British Government will have three years of its term to run. Messrs Kohl and Mitterrand should still have two years in hand.

7. No policy or course of action is risk free. That applies to the continuation of existing policies. The risks of the latter may be as great or greater than those of any other course. The fact that it is easier to avoid responsibility for the consequences of continuing an existing policy than of enunciating a new one is not an argument for refusing change.

8. A number of propositions can be made about the present situation in Europe:

- (a) the presence of 300,000 American soldiers in Western Europe is legitimate but unnatural. At some point in the future, it will come to an end;
- (b) the presence of 550,000 Soviet soldiers in Eastern Europe is both illegitimate and unnatural (though not incomprehensible). At some point it, too, will come to an end;
- (c) failing the negotiated, or at least controlled, withdrawal of these forces the risk of hostilities in Europe between the two super powers is bound to grow if there are other factors encouraging a deterioration in the overall relationship. There are such factors. The proximity of Soviet and American forces to each other is a source of concern rather than reassurance if one assumes that the situation in Eastern Europe may at some point deteriorate radically and unexpectedly;
- (d) the interests of the United States and of Western Europe are not in all respects identical. In recent years this unsurprising fact has become increasingly apparent - to the extent that a marked acerbity has entered the relationship in recent months (admittedly not for the first time but more strikingly perhaps than at any time since the last war);
- (e) it is conceivable that an American President will one day unilaterally reduce or even end the US military presence in Europe. He might do so in a

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fit of isolationism, of irritation, or of domestic weakness. But if Western Europe were to fall under Soviet influence, the balance of power in an increasingly interdependent world would have been shifted irreversibly and decisively to the disadvantage of the US. It is inconceivable, therefore, for reasons of the purest self-interest, that any US Government would ever deliberately "abandon" (i.e. refuse to join in the defence of) Western Europe - always assuming that Western Europe maintains a substantially credible defence capability;

- (f) if reductions in the US presence were made as the result of a unilateral decision in Washington, there would be bitter recrimination from the Western Europeans and no quid pro quo from the Soviet Union. "Neutralist" tendencies in Europe would be greatly encouraged;
- (g) Western Europe's present defence effort is neither cost effective nor adequate. Western Europe will never make the defence effort appropriate to its economic and demographic strength so long as there is a substantial American military presence in the area. The new generation of "emerging technology" weapons may give European governments, if they are prepared to take the opportunity, a chance to make a quantum jump in their defence capabilities in a politically saleable manner;
- (h) for so long as Western Europe lacks some kind of defence identity, the development of all other aspects of European cooperation will be at best stunted. The ability of Western Europe to "help" the Americans in the rest of the world will be equally limited;
- (i) there is no longer any rational reason to fear the Germans, even if such fear is an entirely understandable emotion among the older generation. It is doubtful whether the populations of Western or Eastern Europe - as opposed to that of the Soviet Union - any longer do fear the Germans. Most of them probably also accept - if they think about the point at all - that the division of Germany is an artificial one and that it will come to an end at some point. The attitude of governments - in particular perhaps of the French Government - is more cautious;

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- (j) it is overwhelmingly in the interests of Western European governments either to get Soviet troops out of Eastern Europe or to force their own electorates and their intellectuals to re-acknowledge the nature of the Soviet military presence there (and its implications);
- (k) failing some change in the present situation and in present attitudes, the difficulty of securing adequate public support in Western Europe for a credible conventional and nuclear defence effort is going to grow inexorably;
- (l) there is no sign that arms control negotiations in the current format will ever make substantial progress. Partial and limited agreements may be possible. But measures which really bite are in present circumstances always going to founder on the conflicting fears and perceptions of the two blocs (see previous paper). The argument about data in the MBFR Talks is a locus classicus (when Soviet military planners play war games what assumptions do they make about the Polish army?);
- (m) there are conflicts of view within the Kremlin, particularly perhaps between the generations. We may not know who is in which faction. But we may assume that some will be in favour of experiments, whether with the economy or with foreign policy, and some opposed and that all can be influenced.

#### A Possible Initiative

9. If the argument is to be shifted on to new ground and the present downward spiral broken, something radical has to be attempted. The policy on East-West relations which HMG has been advocating since last summer is sensible and right so far as it goes. But it is unlikely to achieve a major change in the situation. Ideally we want an initiative which will preserve and ultimately strengthen our own position; appeal to our own electorates; and will put the Russians in a difficulty whether they accept or reject it.

10. One possibility would be for NATO (or the Head of a European member Government of NATO) to state formally its (or her) readiness to see all American troops and weapons withdrawn from Western Europe provided that all Soviet troops and weapons were withdrawn from Eastern Europe; and its readiness to open forthwith negotiations to achieve this objective within a finite time span - say, five years, i.e. by 1990. As an alternative, a good deal less clear cut but still radical, one could propose a reduction to some very low figure (say 25,000 on each side armed with conventional weapons) sufficient to maintain facilities for exercises and reinforcement but not much more.



11. The details of such an offer would require exhaustive advance consideration - at least nationally. (One of the most difficult points would be to make the offer public before it leaked). The offer could cover as much or as little as one wanted. But as an outline:-

Both withdrawals should be verified (- given the scale of the operation, on site verification would not need to be particularly rigorous).

Both military pacts, and their members' mutual obligations, should remain in being.

Each super power should undertake to refrain from re-introducing their forces into the withdrawal area except for annual inspected exercises of an agreed size, say, 30,000 men.

This undertaking should cease to be binding on the one super power if breached by the other.

Token conventional forces should remain in Berlin until such time as a settlement between the two Germanies, or a peace treaty, was negotiated.

Existing national nuclear and conventional capabilities should be unaffected by the agreement.

So should the stationing of forces other than those of the super powers in the member countries of the two pacts.

But no nuclear weapons should be deployed in either of the two Germanies, etc. etc.

12. A proposition on these lines would have - or should have - the great merit of being extremely easy to understand and relatively difficult to distort or misrepresent. It may be utopian to suppose that it could ever be made or negotiated. But if it were to be made - and whether accepted or not - it would radically change the nature of the political debate about the future of Europe. The mere fact of putting it forward might be expected to have a number of positive consequences:-

- (i) it would force European electorates (and their governments) to take seriously the need both to provide for their own security and to cooperate effectively in preserving it;

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- (ii) Western Europe's acceptance of a much greater degree of responsibility for its own fate would give a new impetus to the European idea. It would force governments to raise their eyes from the (essentially minor) disagreements which have in recent years acquired such overriding significance within the Community;
- (iii) it would throw the Soviet Government on to the defensive but with a tactic they could hardly describe as threatening. It would force them to face publicly and privately some very uncomfortable facts about their rôle in Eastern Europe. It would undermine their present propaganda campaign in Western Europe;
- (iv) it would give rise to acute disagreements between the governments and peoples of Eastern Europe and those of the Soviet Union. Hopefully it would also give rise to disagreements within the Kremlin. There may be some to whom a measure of disengagement from Eastern Europe would be attractive for economic reasons. There may be others who would welcome the chance of reducing both the risk of conflict in Europe and the influence of the military.

#### Western Reactions

13. Any attempt to change a strategy which has achieved its main objectives over a period of 35 years is going to be unpopular. Specifically an initiative envisaging the departure of the Americans from Europe will be unpopular:

- (a) with most of the military, because the necessity of a strong US nuclear and conventional presence in Western Europe has been the foundation of their strategic thinking since the War;
- (b) with all those who doubt that Western Europe is capable of making the necessary effort to cover the gap that an American departure would leave;
- (c) with many West Germans because they will feel exposed, threatened and uncertain about the future (and because, presumably, they would lose a good deal of income if the Americans left);

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- (d) - paradoxically - with the French and many of the minor member governments of the Alliance because they would feel nervous not only about the Soviet threat but also about the Germans;
- (e) with many Americans because of the need to rethink deeply entrenched strategic assumptions; because redeployment would no doubt be an extremely expensive business; and because the prospect of a resurgent European defence capability would ultimately, though not immediately, threaten the sales prospects of the US defence industry.

None of these drawbacks, important though they are, would seem to be overriding or to be of similar magnitude to the possible gains. Several of them would diminish rapidly once the initial shock had worn off. They do however mean that it would be extremely difficult to secure agreement in advance from the Alliance as a whole that the offer should be made.

#### Soviet Reactions

14. The least likely outcome of such an offer would be Soviet acceptance and implementation. But were this to happen the prospects for Europe and for the world would have been changed fundamentally. Eastern Europe would remain Communist and allied to the Soviet Union. But Moscow would of course have signalled its willingness to accept far-reaching changes in Eastern Europe as the price of reducing the risk of a direct confrontation with the Americans. Such change would no doubt occur. The situation would still be fraught with considerable danger, particularly in the interim period, but at least the possibility of a controllable evolution in Eastern Europe - which does not at present exist - would have been created. (We should be wary of arguing that the dangers of change would be greater than those we now face because we would then be arguing that in fact we prefer to have the Russians in Eastern Europe. And that is almost certainly a recipe for disaster sooner or later.)

15. What would not be true - or certainly need not be true if Western Europe has any stomach for the future at all - is that the prospects of successful Soviet aggression against Western Europe or of the creeping "Finlandisation" of the area would be any greater than they are now. There would no doubt be much talk about credibility, reinforcement times, the difficulty of evaluating Soviet exercises, reversion to a trip-wire strategy etc. etc. But would Western Europe (and in particular West Germany) really be in a worse position strategically following a mutual withdrawal? It seems very doubtful.



16. A somewhat less unlikely outcome is an outright Soviet rejection of the offer as a trick, a provocation or whatever. This possibility might be said to be a strong reason for making the offer as soon as possible rather than for withholding it. The Russians would have incurred a major propaganda reverse. The firm attribution of responsibility for the US military presence in Western Europe to the Russians will make it significantly easier to defend the former etc. etc.

17. There is the counter-balancing risk that once a Western Head of Government, or group of governments, has advocated the withdrawal of American troops in certain conditions, such a withdrawal may ultimately become more difficult to resist even if the conditions are not met. But this ought not to be a decisive objection. If it is the case that the present disarray in Western Europe is undesirable and if it is also the case that only the prospect of US withdrawal is likely to focus the minds of Western Europeans effectively, then the risk that we may end up with unrequited US withdrawals should be accepted.

18. A much more likely scenario than outright Soviet acceptance or rejection is a prolonged East-West haggle leading, perhaps, to partial withdrawals by both super powers. But providing Western negotiators start from a publicly stated willingness to envisage the departure of all US forces, then the advantages of discomfiting the Russians, stimulating the West Europeans and making the Americans think anew about where their real interests lie should have been won.

#### Conclusion

19. The idea of proposing a total US withdrawal probably comes into the "too difficult" category. But if so - and if the analysis in the first half of this paper and in last year's is broadly correct - we need to think very carefully indeed about where we are headed and how we are going to avoid arriving there.

14 March, 1984