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Press Release

Embargo: 1000 hrs: 28 March 1987

EXTRACTS FROM SPEECH BY THE RT HON SIR GEOFFREY HOWE QC MP,
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS, TO BOW
GROUP CONFERENCE ON EAST/WEST RELATIONS AT OXFORD: 28 MARCH 1987

The key question in East/West relations today is what Mr Gorbachev's intentions are about future Soviet relations with the West.

Our visit to Moscow gives us an excellent opportunity to make progress in answering this question, and to assess at first hand Mr Gorbachev's approach not only to arms control, but to global co-existence of the democratic and the communist political systems.

A restrained and co-operative approach by the Soviet Union to regional tensions would be an important gain for world peace.

We shall seek to promote that. But we are right to be cautious. Soviet actions on human rights for their own citizens, and in Afghanistan are bound to be an important test of their intentions.

While we are tackling these important issues the British public are presented with the spectacle of the Labour Party twisting and turning, ducking and weaving, in an attempt to evade the consequences of their irresponsible policies.

The number of conflicting propositions advanced by Mr Kinnock and Mr Healey grows daily.

They claim they have always supported the zero-zero option - indeed they thought of it first!

Yet they have always opposed NATO's deployment of Cruise and Pershing missiles in Europe, without which the zero-zero option could not be realised.

They have declared that nuclear weapons are immoral, endanger our safety, and do nothing for disarmament. Yet they now admit that giving them away would endanger the arms control negotiations.

They say they would allow Cruise to stay in Britain for a period to help disarmament.

They say they have no stop-watch on removing NATO nuclear weapons from Britain - but that they must go in the life-time of a Parliament.

Such bizarre and contradictory propositions are difficult to take seriously.

The simple fact is that Britain's firm stand with its NATO allies has improved the prospects for multilateral arms reductions. The British Labour Party has not yet learned how to live with that fact.

CDMD MEETING

Sir Geoffrey Howe told MPs at a pre-Moscow briefing that expectations of a breakthrough on arms control as a result of the visit were "much exaggerated".

The central purpose of the visit was to assess the real intentions of Mr Gorbachev about future Soviet relations with the West.

"The West has held firm for four decades, in the face of enormous military and political pressure from the Soviet Union. It may be that the Soviet Union now recognises the futility of trying to intimidate us. If 'live and let live' is the new motto of the new Kremlin men that is a gain for everyone."

{On arms control there would be "a useful exploration of positions" and "a chance to explain European and Western security concerns".}