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“The Most Staunch and Dependable of the Allies”?

Britain and the Zero Option

President Reagan regarded the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty[1] as one of the crowning achievements of his Presidency: a critical step towards ending the Cold War, and achieving his vision of a world without nuclear weapons.[2] Although Margaret Thatcher played an important role in facilitating this outcome, as a committed believer in nuclear deterrence the British Prime Minister had reservations about the INF Treaty and the “zero option” that it codified: the total elimination of all U.S. and Soviet intermediate-range, land-based systems. In her memoirs, Thatcher professed to have “always had mixed feelings about the INF ‘zero option’ […] First, it threatened precisely what Helmut Schmidt had wanted to avoid when he originally urged NATO to deploy them: namely the decoupling of Europe from NATO […] Second, the INF ‘zero option’ also cast doubt on—though as I always argued it did not in fact undermine—the NATO strategy of ‘flexible response’.” Finally, the “removal of the intermediate-range missiles might be argued to create a gap” in NATO’s deterrence posture.[3]

A comprehensive archival-based study of the British reaction to the INF Treaty awaits the release of the outstanding relevant government files from 1986 to 1988.[4] However, a close examination of Britain’s role during the first phase of the INF negotiations from 1981 to 1983 can help to shed valuable light on the origins and substance of Thatcher’s “mixed feelings” about the zero option. It can also help us to understand why Britain not only acquiesced, but gave active sup-

1 Thanks go to Dr Roham Alvandi, Prof Nigel Ashton, Dr Alistair Feltham, Prof David Holloway, Prof Matthew Jones, Dr Adam Lyons, Sir Richard Mottram, Prof Leopoldo Nuti, Prof David Yost, the editors of this volume, and others unnamed for their comments on this chapter. Any errors that remain are my own.
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2 Ronald Reagan, An American Life: The Autobiography, New York 1990, pp. 699 f.

3 Margaret Thatcher, The Downing Street Years, London 1993, p. 771.

4 Britain’s role in implementing the Dual-Track decision will be covered in detail by the author’s forthcoming PhD thesis in International History at the London School of Economics, provisionally entitled “Dual Track Diplomacy: Britain, Intermediate Nuclear Forces, and Transatlantic Relations, 1977–87”.

port, to an Allied negotiating position about which it held such deep misgivings from its earliest inception. As a NATO nuclear power and a prospective basing nation for American ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs), Britain was at the heart of Allied debates in 1981 over when to resume the INF negotiations, and what negotiating position to adopt. President Reagan's decision in November 1981 to seek the elimination of all U. S. and Soviet land-based, intermediate-range missiles defined the scope and the objectives of the INF negotiations. This chapter helps to explain the uneasiness Thatcher felt about the zero option by considering to what extent and why Britain lived up to its self-appointed role as "the most staunch and dependable of the allies" when it came to INF.[5] In so doing, it sheds light on transatlantic relations and the inner workings of the Anglo-American "special relationship" during the Thatcher–Reagan years.

In October 1980, the Carter Administration held inconclusive, exploratory INF talks with the Soviets in Geneva.[6] When President Reagan took office in January 1981, he faced calls from the European Allies for an early resumption of these negotiations.[7] Britain stood in the middle between a new American administration that was determined to pursue "peace through strength" and the European Allies, who remained committed to détente and were far less skeptical about arms control.[8] In a bid to resume U.S.–Soviet talks, Britain helped to foster mutual understanding and to cultivate unity amongst the Allies. Thatcher was quick to welcome the talks, although she and her officials harbored deep misgivings about Reagan's declared negotiating objective, the zero option, whereby the U.S. offered to forego deployment of its land-based, intermediate-range missiles in return for the Soviets eliminating all of theirs.[9]

One episode, in particular, illustrates the ambivalence of Britain's views about the zero option from the very outset. On October 20, 1982, faced with growing public unease about the forthcoming deployment in the UK of GLCMs and stalemate in the INF negotiations, John Nott, the British Defence Secretary, wrote to Thatcher, calling for a "more positive tone" on arms control. Nott called, in particular, for consideration of a "British initiative" on arms control so that Her

5 The National Archives (TNA), PREM19/979, Pym to Thatcher, October 25, 1982.

6 Maynard W. Glitman, The Last Battle of the Cold War. An Inside Account of Negotiating the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, Basingstoke 2006, p. 48.

7 Ralph Dietl, Beyond Parity. Europe and the SALT Process in the Carter Era, 1977–1981, Stuttgart 2016, p. 258.

8 Ronald Reagan, Address to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention in Chicago, August 18, 1980, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=85202 (accessed February 20, 2018); Kristina Spohr, The Global Chancellor. Helmut Schmidt and the Reshaping of the International Order, Oxford 2016, pp. 111–120. See also Philipp Gassert, Tim Geiger, and Hermann Wentker (eds.), Zweiter Kalter Krieg und Friedensbewegung. Der NATO-Doppelbeschluss in deutsch-deutscher und internationaler Perspektive, Munich 2011.

9 Ronald Reagan, Remarks to Members of the National Press Club on Arms Reduction and Nuclear Weapons, November 18, 1981, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=43264 (accessed February 20, 2018). See the contributions by Beth Fischer and Ronald Granieri to this volume.

Majesty's Government (HMG) would "no longer [...] look—as the public sees it—to be the creature of the Americans."[10] In a brief note five days later, the Foreign Secretary, Francis Pym, cautioned against taking any precipitous action that risked undermining the modernization of NATO's INF and, by extension, the special relationship:

So far we have been the most staunch and dependable of the allies in our support for the modernisation programme. Any hint at this stage that we were having second thoughts about the 1979 decision [...] could put at risk the whole enterprise. The impact of this, in particular on the Americans, would be extremely serious.[11]

On similar grounds, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the lead government department for arms control, was resisting calls from European Allies for a shift in NATO's negotiating position that would show greater flexibility than the Americans' strict focus on complete elimination allowed.[12] Nonetheless, behind closed doors, the FCO and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) harbored reservations about both the achievability and desirability of the zero option, and had, since the summer, been busy investigating so-called "fallback positions".[13]

What explains this apparent contradiction? Why did Pym and the FCO deem it so important to maintain "staunch and dependable" support for a negotiating position about which HMG held deep misgivings, for which it was paying an increasing political price, and to which it was privately exploring alternatives?

Although British officials eschewed unilateral diplomatic initiatives regarding INF, Britain played a prominent role behind the scenes, ensuring that transatlantic ties were not strained to breaking point and that progress was made on both the arms control and deployment tracks. At times, Britain acted as a "transatlantic bridge" fostering mutual understanding and mediating differences that threatened NATO unity. On other occasions, Britain acted more like an enforcer, reminding Allies on both sides of the Atlantic of their obligations and the consequences for transatlantic and East–West relations should they renege. Two assumptions that were held across Whitehall were firstly that Britain's credibility to perform the roles of mediator and enforcer stemmed from its dependability as an Ally, and secondly that Britain's dependability was the bedrock to its jealously guarded special relationship with the Americans. Following the suspension of all high-level engagement with the Soviets after their invasion of Afghanistan, any influence Britain exerted over the INF negotiations would have to come via the Americans. This put an additional premium on the special relationship and Britain's dependability as an Ally, particularly since HMG was dependent upon the Americans for protecting its most vital interest in the INF negotiations:

10 TNA, PREM19/979, FCO46/3101, Nuclear Issues, Nott to Thatcher, October 20, 1982.

11 TNA, PREM19/979, Pym to Thatcher, October 25, 1982.

12 TNA, FCO46/3136, Record of Discussion with Herr Egon Bahr (SPD) on Arms Control matters, FCO, 16 February 1982, March 2, 1982.

13 TNA, FCO46/3098, INF Negotiations—Future Work, Price to Gozney, September 20, 1982.

ensuring that the sacrosanct British independent deterrent remained outside the arms control framework. The price of American protection was Britain's support of a negotiating position that it hoped privately would never come to pass: the elimination of all INF under a zero option. Nonetheless, the Thatcher Government never fully reconciled itself to the zero option and hoped to exploit the political capital it had earned by supporting the Americans at a difficult time to wrest a change in the negotiating position when the time was right. However, Anglo-American relations were both more vexed and complex than the public bonhomie between Thatcher and Reagan would suggest.

1. The Significance of INF for Britain

In 1977, the Soviets had begun fielding SS-20s, giving them a capability to strike significant military and political targets across Western Europe with little warning. NATO had fielded no equivalent land-based system since President John F. Kennedy's decision to remove Thor and Jupiter missiles from Europe after the Cuban Missile Crisis.[14] Helmut Schmidt, the West German Chancellor, feared that the SS-20 would undermine regional stability by creating an imbalance at the theater-level. Without a Western response, Soviet superiority at the "Eurostrategic" level would undermine the credibility of American security guarantees by raising the prospect of "decoupling" European security from U. S. central strategic systems.[15] Only by securing negotiated reductions in Soviet systems or by responding symmetrically and deploying their own INF could NATO Allies shore up the "Eurostrategic balance" and re-establish the credibility of U. S. extended deterrence guarantees.[16]

Over the next two years an Alliance consensus formed around pursuing arms control and INF modernization in parallel, the so-called Dual-Track Decision. However, views varied amongst the prospective basing nations as to the rationale and imperative behind INF modernization.[17] Understanding the different strategic assessments that underlay each Ally's support for deployment helps to explain the different emphasis that they placed on arms control and the different reactions that they later had towards the zero option. Michael Quinlan, the Deputy Under Secretary for Policy and Programmes at the MOD and the doyen of British deterrence thinking, disagreed with Schmidt's reasoning, if not the

14 Lawrence Freedman, Kennedy's Wars. Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam, Oxford 2000, p. 222.

15 Ivo H. Daalder, The Nature and Practice of Flexible Response. NATO Strategy and Theater Nuclear Forces Since 1967, New York 1991, pp. 16,9 f.

16 Spohr, Global Chancellor, pp. 59, 93; Tim Geiger, The NATO Double-Track Decision: Genesis and Implementation, in: Christoph Becker-Schaum, Philipp Gassert, Martin Klimke, Wilfried Mausbach, and Marianne Zepp (eds.), The Nuclear Crisis. The Arms Race, Cold War Anxiety, and the German Peace Movement of the 1980s, New York/Oxford 2016, pp. 53 f.

17 Daalder, The Nature and Practice of Flexible Response, pp. 182–190.

imperative, for modernizing NATO's INF. Quinlan believed it was Schmidt's talk of separate regional balances that risked decoupling, by drawing an artificial, conceptual distinction between American and European security. Instead, it was the lack of credible NATO response options between tactical nuclear use and the resort to strategic nuclear weapons that risked decoupling and gave rise to the requirement for modernizing NATO's INF.

According to the November 1978 Duff-Mason Report—commissioned by Thatcher's predecessor, Jim Callaghan, to prepare the ground for a potential successor to the Polaris strategic delivery system—in a period of parity, "[s]trategic nuclear forces […] cannot in themselves directly deter Warsaw Pact aggression at substantially lower levels" than general nuclear war.[18] NATO's policy of flexible response required the Allies to possess a range of scalable response options that could be employed in a graduated manner to manage the escalation of a nuclear crisis with the USSR. In part to offset the Warsaw Pact's conventional superiority, NATO had a significant preponderance in tactical nuclear weapons. In order to meet NATO's strategic requirement, the UK and U. S. assigned Polaris and Poseidon submarines respectively to NATO. In between, at the theater-level, NATO's nuclear forces consisted of aging Vulcan and F-111 medium-range bombers, whose ability to penetrate Soviet air defenses was increasingly in doubt.[19] The nature and characteristics of British and French nuclear systems meant they could not meet this sub-strategic role, leaving a gap in NATO's deterrence posture.[20] This structural deficiency risked the "sanctuarization" of Moscow, and that the European Allies would conclude that the U. S. might not be prepared to make the leap from tactical to strategic nuclear employment for fear of escalation to an all-out nuclear exchange.[21] This deterrence gap could lead to decoupling and the erosion of the Allies' confidence in American extended deterrence, and risk ceding escalation dominance to the Soviet Union, and potentially "victory" in any hot war in Central Europe that might occur. In order both to deter the Soviets and to reassure the Allies, NATO needed a sub-strategic capability for a deep strike to ensure a "visible ladder of escalation with no rungs missing."[22] The consequence of "the rapid growth in Soviet long-range nuclear capability" and the "increasing age and vulnerability" of "the Alliance's own equivalent forces" meant that INF modernization was "essential if we are to avoid a dangerous gap emerging in NATO's theatre nuclear capability. Such a gap would weaken the

18 Duff-Mason Report, quoted in: Kristan Stoddart, Creating the "Seamless Robe of Deterrence": Great Britain's Role in NATOs INF Debate, in: Leopoldo Nuti, Frédéric Bozo, Marie-Pierre Rey, and Bernd Rother (eds.), The Euromissile Crisis and the End of the Cold War, Washington, D. C./Stanford, CA 2015, p. 185.

19 Tanya Ogilvie-White, On Nuclear Deterrence. The Correspondence of Sir Michael Quinlan, London 2011, p. 179.

20 TNA, FCO46/2703, Legge to Gozney, Exclusion of UK Strategic Deterrent from LRTNF Negotiations, August 20, 1981.

21 Daalder, Nature and Practice of Flexible Response, p. 152.

22 Ibid., pp. 179–180.

Alliance's strategy of flexible response and so cast doubt on the credibility of our deterrent."[23]

Schmidt's focus on addressing a perceived theater nuclear imbalance gave him a greater interest in arms control than the emphasis on correcting structural deficiencies in NATO's nuclear posture gave Quinlan. Taken to its extreme, Schmidt's position implied that if the Soviets withdrew all of their INF, there would be no imbalance; the Allies could therefore forego deploying any intermediate-range missiles of their own. By contrast, Quinlan believed that the deficiencies in NATO's force structure existed irrespective of the SS-20. Flexible response required a spectrum of capabilities regardless of whether the Soviets fielded intermediate-range systems of their own; arms control could reduce, but not eliminate, the requirement for INF modernization. In short, Schmidt's strategic analysis allowed for a zero option; Quinlan's did not.

Quinlan's analysis was widely shared by British officials and ministers alike. Ultimately, Britain's overriding strategic interest was in INF modernization; arms control was the price, not the prize, for maintaining Allied consensus. As the basing nation with the largest share of INF and the only Ally to host Pershing II missiles, West Germany was the key to Dual-Track. By January 1981, the growth in anti-nuclear sentiment across Western Europe led the FCO to conclude that the resumption of the INF negotiations had become "a political *sine qua non* for [INF] modernisation particularly in FRG".[24] Progress was necessary on both tracks if the fragile Allied consensus on Dual-Track was to hold. With preparations for deployment already underway, the priority in January 1981 was to begin substantive negotiations.

2. Beginning Substantive Negotiations

Despite occasional flurries of ministerial activity, day-to-day responsibility for implementing Dual-Track and engaging Allies rested with officials. The Defence Department in the Foreign Office was responsible for INF arms control and for staffing NATO's Special Consultative Group (SCG) whereas Defence Secretariat 17 (DS17) in the MOD was responsible for INF deployment and for staffing NATO's High Level Group (HLG). Despite the creative tensions inherent to Dual-Track, there was a large degree of consensus between the FCO and the MOD concerning how it should be implemented. Forced to choose, both diplomats and defense officials would have prioritized deployment over arms control. However, both would have rejected the choice as a false dichotomy. The same underlying analysis guided both departments: Alliance cohesion rested on preserving the

23 Pym in: Hansard, December 13, 1979, *Vol. 975, cc. 1540–1556.*

24 TNA, FCO46/2700, Prime Minister's Visit to the United States, 25–28 February 1981, East/West Relations, February 19, 1981.

uneasy compromise at the heart of Dual-Track by implementing both tracks in parallel and beginning the negotiations promptly.

The British government, unlike its Dutch and German counterparts, actively avoided projecting a distinctive, national voice on INF. In April 1982, Sir Curtis Keeble, Her Majesty's Ambassador to Moscow, proposed a dialogue between British and Soviet experts to discuss the INF balance. London rejected the proposal because of the risk that comparing figures with the Soviets:

> may be seen as pre-empting a US role. It would come at a time when the Europeans, including the UK, are trying to impress upon a reluctant American Administration the need to speed up steps towards the resumption of talks. Even if we kept the US fully informed of what we were doing, the risk that they would misunderstand our motive and suspect that we were applying pressure by the back door is great [...] It might also lead to UK involvement in negotiations which, because of our concern to exclude UK systems, it is strongly in our interest should remain a US/USSR bilateral matter.[25]

Any differences in the Allies' approach or objectives would provide the Soviet Union with opportunities to drive wedges between the Allies, and between European governments and their publics. As a political test of Alliance unity, it was imperative that all Allies abided by Alliance policy on INF and did not promote their own national policy. As a NATO nuclear power and a prospective basing nation for GLCMs, Britain felt that it had a particular duty to act as a role model in this respect. This was one reason why Britain was determined to be the "most staunch and dependable of the allies" when it came to INF. The other was to maximize British insight and influence in Washington, and thus to ensure American protection of the UK's independent deterrent.

Britain's direct, early engagement with the Reagan Administration helped to temper perceived excesses, to bridge transatlantic differences, and ultimately to begin the INF negotiations. The depth of the UK–U.S. nuclear relationship and the political affinity between their respective governments helped British officials to have the insight, influence, and rapport with their American counterparts necessary to conduct their first bit of mediation and enforcement of 1981.[26] Reagan's anti-Communism and the skepticism towards arms control shown by Administration hard-liners like Richard Perle, the new Assistant Secretary of Defense for Global Strategic Affairs and the Department of Defense (DoD) lead for INF, jarred with many Europeans' continued interest in détente and dialogue with the East. References by Caspar Weinberger, the new Secretary of Defense, to the possible manufacture and deployment of the Enhanced Radiation Warhead (ERW) and by Reagan to the preparedness of the Soviet leadership to "commit any

25 TNA, FCO46/2728, Proposal for a UK/Soviet Discussion on TNF Figures, Gillmore to Moberly, undated.

26 Charles Moore, Margaret Thatcher. The Authorized Biography. Volume 1: Not for Turning, London 2014, p. 565.

crime, to lie, and to cheat" only exacerbated European doubts that Dual-Track would survive the change in administration.[27]

The "Iron Lady" shared many of Reagan's views about East–West relations, including his desire for a more robust approach to arms control. Thatcher was certainly not prepared for Britain's independent nuclear deterrent to be included in arms control negotiations. To her, the SS-20 was just the latest evidence that the "threat of the Soviet Union is ever present. It is growing continually."[28] Leonid Brezhnev's offer on February 23, 1981 of a moratorium on SS-20 deployments in return for NATO abandoning modernization provided scant evidence that an equal, verifiable INF arms control agreement was possible, at least in the short-term.[29] The process of reaching the Dual-Track Decision in December 1979, however, had alerted Thatcher to the strength of European concerns and the risk posed to transatlantic relations should the new Administration be seen to renege on the arms control track.[30]

Early efforts by the Foreign Office to persuade the Reagan Administration to announce a start date for the INF talks revealed that the Americans were not willing "to be rushed on arms control negotiations".[31] In January 1981, the Administration launched a comprehensive review of U.S. arms control policy. Consequently, the start date for negotiations and the Allied negotiating position became ensnared in a vicious interagency debate that pitched critics of SALT like Perle against SALT-era holdovers like the new chair of the SCG, Assistant Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger.[32] The Assistant Under Secretary of State for Defence and International Security at the FCO, Patrick Moberly, described the American policy review as "understandable, indeed commendable"; however, he cautioned that until it reported INF "will be awkward for us and our European Allies", especially "if the Americans take matters as slowly as they may prefer."[33] Reports from Bonn of the increasing frictions over INF within Schmidt's own party, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), only confirmed Moberly's suspicion.[34] In May 1981, Schmidt threatened to resign should the SPD reverse its support for INF modernization. The fate of the Schmidt government hung on the resumption of negotiations.

27 TNA, FCO46/2771, Washington TELNO 1203, Bonn to FCO TELNO 273, April 16, 1981; The President's News Conference, January 29, 1981.

28 Moore, Margaret Thatcher: Vol 1, p. 559.

29 R.W. Apple Jr., Brezhnev Proposes Talks with Reagan to Mend Relations, in: The New York Times, February 24, 1981, p. A1, A5, https://www.nytimes.com/1981/02/24/world/brezhnev-proposes-talks-with-reagan-to-mend-relations.html (accessed February 26, 2020); Leonid I. Breschnew, Auf dem Wege Lenins. Reden und Aufsätze. April 1979–März 1981, Bd. 8, Berlin (East) 1982, p. 756.

30 Moore, Margaret Thatcher, p. 568.

31 TNA, FCO46/2700, TNF Arms Control, Moberly to Private Secretary to Secretary of State (PS/SoS) for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, February 20, 1981.

32 TNA, FCO46/2704, Eagleburger and Perle, Renwick to Weston, September 22, 1981.

33 TNA, FCO46/2700, TNF Arms Control, Moberly to PS/SoS, February 20, 1981.

34 TNA, FCO46/2715, State of the Coalition, Bonn to FCO TELNO 069, January 30, 1981.

Like many European Allies when it came to arms control, Britain enjoyed closer relations with the State Department than the DoD. Eagleburger was concerned that the Europeans were not being more vocal, and encouraged them to "make their views known to others in Washington beside the State Department."[35] Deputy Under Secretary of State Julian Bullard cautioned against Britain "becoming involved in Washington wrangles" but appreciated that "it would be unfortunate to say the least if opponents of arms control in Washington, particularly in the DoD, were allowed to get the wrong impression simply because we and other Europeans failed to speak up."[36] On February 27, 1981, Thatcher and her Foreign Secretary, Lord Carrington, met Weinberger in Washington. They stressed the realities of European politics and tried to dispel Weinberger's misconception that some Europeans were trying to "escape" from the Dual-Track Decision. The tone of Weinberger's public remarks improved, but he remained reluctant to commit to a start date until the Administration had concluded studies on the interrelationship between arms control and the planned rearmament program.

Alexander Haig, the U.S. Secretary of State and former Supreme Allied Commander Europe, proved more sympathetic to European concerns, although even his views demanded some gentle correction. Carrington persuaded Haig that a lack of Allied consultation, not a lack of American leadership, was the biggest short-term risk to Allied cohesion and that an early SCG meeting was essential.[37] As a dependable Ally, Carrington could afford to be blunt. At a later meeting in July, Carrington told Haig that "full consultations would help to dispel the suspicions of the ill-natured that the Americans were simply indulging in a charade."[38] Carrington also corrected Haig's misapprehension that the European Allies were in the grip of radicals. "In Britain, for example, very many middle of the road people were worried about the increasing lethality of nuclear weapons and wished to see a reduction on numbers. But these people were not neutralists."[39]

Carrington had left an impression. At the National Security Council (NSC) meeting on April 30, 1981, Haig cited Carrington and Thatcher's testimony that "European leaders cannot maintain domestic consensus behind [INF] modernization without a specific date for the start of [INF] negotiations."[40] Britain's influence over the DoD, however, remained limited. Weinberger's deputy, Frank

35 TNA, FCO46/2701, NAC Meeting, Rome 4/5 May: TNF Arms Control, Bullard to Quinlan, May 7, 1981.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 TNA, FCO46/2703, Record of a Meeting between the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and the United States Secretary of State: State Department, Washington, Friday 17 July 1981, undated.

39 Ibid.

40 Minutes of NSC Meeting 8: Theater Nuclear Forces, April 30, 1981, http://insidethecoldwar.org/part-3/chapter-11 (accessed January 31, 2018).

Carlucci, refused to be rushed by Allies whom he regarded as "really not interested in theater nuclear deployments or survivability. They regard [INF] simply as a tripwire which would lead to use of US strategic systems."[41] By contrast, Haig's reference to a dependable Ally like Britain, who saw a vital role for INF in strengthening NATO's deterrence posture, carried weight with Reagan. The President would not commit himself to a specific date, but did agree that Haig could announce that negotiations would resume by the end of 1981.[42]

British pressure, sensitively applied, helped to cajole the Reagan Administration into making small, but decisive steps towards the resumption of negotiations. The fragility of Schmidt's political position and the centrality of West Germany to NATO's modernization program gave the Federal Government considerable leverage over the Americans. Britain's dependability and discretion, however, gave it a standing in American eyes that less reliable Allies lacked. Nonetheless, there were limits to Britain's insight and influence over American decision-making and consequently to Britain's ability to reassure the Europeans. Ultimately, Britain could not defuse the explosive interagency debates that delayed the conclusion of the American policy review. If anything, the strength of the relationship British diplomats enjoyed with their State Department counterparts undermined their influence when it came to the Pentagon.[43] The heavy reliance upon the U.S. Department of State for insights into Beltway politics narrowed, if not distorted, the insight the Foreign Office had into the American policy review.[44] Britain's relationship with the State Department had helped secure a start to the negotiations, but would stymie Britain's attempts to influence the debate in Washington about the INF negotiating position.

3. The Zero Option

Although, at the Rome North Atlantic Council (NAC) in May 1981, Haig committed the U.S. to resuming the INF talks by the end of the year, the Reagan Administration remained deeply divided about the objectives of these negotiations. When announcing the Dual-Track Decision, the Allies were deliberately vague

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 British diplomats would not have improved their stock had the Pentagon realized the number of barbed anecdotes that London and the British Embassy Washington exchanged via the diplomatic bag about Perle and other so-called hard-liners in the Administration. See e.g. TNA, FCO46/2703, Richard Perle, Weston to Renwick, July 28, 1981.

44 The majority of MOD files on INF arms control remain classified, therefore it is not possible to reach definitive conclusions about the extent of MOD–DoD contacts, and the insight that this provided. However, the FCO files contain many MOD documents, including MOD reports from NATO and bilateral meetings with the Americans. The majority concern INF modernization and the deliberations of the HLG, which Perle chaired.

about the scale of reductions to NATO's INF deployments that they envisaged as a result of any arms control agreement.[45] The Dutch were keen to signal that all NATO deployments could be cancelled as a result of an arms control agreement; the UK and U.S. rejected this out of hand, believing that it would detract from the rationale and resolve to modernize INF.[46] The final language of the NATO communiqué papered over these differences, stating simply that "limitations should take the form of *de jure* equality both in ceilings and in rights."[47] The (still) classified Integrated Decision Document that accompanied the communiqué was more specific in describing NATO's objective as the negotiation of equal ceilings at the "lowest possible level," whilst noting that the complete elimination of all INF was "highly unlikely" given the current Soviet monopoly.[48] At least privately, therefore, the Alliance had not ruled out the possibility of a zero option: the cancellation of NATO's INF modernization program in exchange for the elimination of all equivalent Soviet systems.

When, in early 1981, Britain lobbied the Reagan Administration to make an explicit commitment to the Dual-Track Decision, this included a restatement of the American commitment to the objective of equal ceilings at the lowest possible level. Nonetheless, the Foreign Office continued to consider the adoption of a strict zero-only option as NATO's public position "divisive".[49] Firstly, it would allow Brezhnev to ask disingenuously "what the West wanted in return" for zero, if not the moratorium he had already offered. Secondly, "in the highly unlikely situation that the Russians agreed" to withdraw all their INF, "the strategic requirement for […] modernisation would remain."[50] Finally, the FCO worried that the sheer unnegotiability of the zero option could lead to pressure to widen the scope of the INF negotiations when they inevitably stalled, and thus put the British strategic deterrent at risk of inclusion.

The Foreign Office was very glad to learn in July 1981 that the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the *Auswärtiges Amt*, shared its misgivings about the zero option. Adolf von Wagner, one of the leading German officials for INF arms control, confided to British diplomats that the zero option offered "endless scope for 'twisting' by the Soviet Union, particularly if the emphasis were placed on 'zero' NATO missiles as the starting-point," as prominent left-wingers in the

45 Communiqué of the Special Meeting of Foreign and Defence Ministers, December 12, 1979, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_27040.htm (accessed February 20, 2020).

46 Dietl, Beyond Parity, p. 213.

47 Communique of the Special Meeting of Foreign and Defence Ministers, December 12, 1979, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_27040.htm (accessed February 20, 2020).

48 TNA, FCO46/2703, FRG Non-paper Preparation of LRTNF negotiations, August 26, 1981.

49 TNA, FCO46/2729, The TNF Balance: The Secretary of State's Talks with Gromyko and Brandt's Visit to Moscow, July 1981.

50 Ibid.

SPD stressed, "and not on the need to reduce SS-20s."[51] However, in the space of a month the Federal Government concluded, under growing domestic pressure, that a reference to the zero option in the Allies' public negotiating position was unavoidable.[52] Nonetheless, the Germans preferred that NATO adopt what became known as the "zero plus option" to a strict zero-only option.[53] NATO should announce that although elimination was the ultimate objective of the INF negotiations, the Allies were prepared to consider (and by implication thought more realistic) a verifiable agreement that established equality in INF somewhere above zero.

Concerned as they were about the fragility of the German Government, British officials were even more worried about the suggestion made by some Allies that there were grounds for some flexibility about the exclusion of British and French nuclear systems from the INF negotiations. Ultimately, the only thing more important to Britain than preserving Allied cohesion and strengthening NATO's seamless web of deterrence was keeping the sacrosanct British independent deterrent out of the negotiations. For all that, British officials were conscious of the fragility of their arguments about Polaris being strategic in nature, if intermediate in range. As Quinlan put it, "our interest in ensuring exclusion is perhaps rather stronger than our logical case for it."[54] Consequently, Britain was reluctant to countenance as dramatic a shift in the Allies' public position as the zero option lest it undermine the rationale for INF modernization and mark the start of a slippery slope towards expanding the scope of the negotiations, and thus jeopardize the exclusion of the British strategic deterrent.

From its previous interactions with the DoD, the Foreign Office fully expected that Perle and the hard-liners would oppose both the zero and zero plus options. Although Perle was highly critical of what he regarded as the Europeans' fickle attitude towards deployment, he was himself at best ambivalent about INF modernization.[55] For all his zealous attachment to deterrence, Perle did not find Quinlan's argument compelling that INF modernization was essential to maintain a seamless web of deterrence, or to prevent decoupling. The weapons were too few in number, and the political costs involved in deploying them too great. Perle did not therefore share Britain's concern about the consequences should the Soviets accept the zero option. Instead, Perle embraced the political opportunities presented by zero to call the Soviets' bluff, and to entrap Allies into

51 TNA, FCO46/2729, Theatre Nuclear Forces, Bailes to Gozney, July 9, 1981. For the Auswärtige Amt's judgement of Brezhnev's proposal see Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (AAPD) 1981, ed. by Daniela Taschler, Matthias Peter, and Judith Michel, Munich 2012, Doc. 51.

52 TNA, FCO46/2703, FRG Non-paper Preparation of LRTNF negotiations, August 26, 1981.

53 Ibid.

54 TNA, FCO46/2730, Quinlan to Gillmore, July 21, 1981.

55 Strobe Talbott, Deadly Gambits. The Reagan Administration and the Stalemate in Nuclear Arms Control, New York 1984, pp. 43–45.

pursuing deployment when the negotiations inevitably failed. At the October 13, 1981 NSC Meeting, Weinberger spoke to Perle's brief, describing the zero option as a win-win. We:

> need to consider a bold plan, sweeping in nature, to capture world opinion. If refused by the Soviets, they would take the blame for its rejection. If the Soviets agree, we would achieve the balance that we've lost. Such a plan would be to propose a 'zero option' […] If we adopt the 'zero option' approach and the Soviets reject it after we have given it a good try; this will leave the Europeans in a position where they would really have no alternative to modernization.[56]

The Pentagon's surprise embrace of the zero option caught the FCO off-guard. Contacts at the State Department reassured British diplomats that the Administration would never adopt a strict zero-only option.[57] Nonetheless, Gillmore did not keep quiet about his misgivings. In an uncharacteristically direct intervention at the September SCG meeting, Gillmore expressed three reservations about the zero option:

> First, it must not form the main plank of the approach to negotiations. If it did NATO would have to breach its own aim in late 1983. Secondly, there was a risk of building up false expectations of what arms control could do. Thirdly, there was a danger of putting the cart before the horse. Public presentation had to be kept in perspective to avoid a situation where the public posture began to dictate the negotiating position.[58]

Gillmore's MOD counterparts shared his misgivings, but were less vexed since they were confident that the Soviets would not accept zero, and that in the unlikely event of the Soviets doing so, they believed that the elimination of the SS-20s would outweigh all other considerations, including "the strategic rationale for [INF] modernisation."[59]

Gradually the ground began to shift under the British position as an Allied consensus formed around zero plus. On October 13, Gillmore hosted a meeting of the SCG Inner Group at Chevening.[60] Gillmore discovered that the Germans remained "strongly attached" to a reference to the zero option in Allied public statements: "we may have to make some concession on the zero option which is assuming considerable importance in the public debate in the Federal Republic."[61] Gillmore was prepared to recommend acquiescence to zero plus

56 Minutes of NSC Meeting 22: Theater Nuclear Forces, Egypt, October 13, 1981, http://insidethecoldwar.org/part-3/chapter-11 (accessed January 31, 2018).

57 TNA, FCO46/2703, TNF, Renwick to Logan, August 28, 1981.

58 TNA, FCO46/2704, UK Summary Record of the Special Consultative Group Meeting in Brussels, 16 September 1981, September 24, 1981.

59 TNA, FCO46/2706, The Zero Option, Legge to Gillmore, October 28, 1981.

60 TNA, FCO46/2705, TNF Arms Control: Meeting at Chevening, 13 October of the Inner Group, Gillmore to PS/SoS, October 13, 1981.

61 Ibid.

and to support the new NATO consensus only after Eagleburger gave him an unambiguous assurance “that the United States Government was firmly wedded to the principle that neither British nor French nuclear systems should be included in the negotiations, nor should ‘compensation’ be offered to the Russians for these systems.”[62] At the September SCG, Eagleburger gave such an assurance, stressing that this was “a matter of deep principle and the Allies could not expect any change in the future.”[63]

With Britain’s vital interest secured and Allied consensus reached on zero plus, the British regarded American endorsement of the negotiating position largely as a formality. Certainly, British officials felt that a decision in favor of the strict, zero-only option “would make nonsense of the processes of consultation so far conducted in the SCG.”[64] Five days after the NSC meeting, Gillmore was confident that Haig and zero plus had won the day.[65] Only on November 18, 1981, the day of the speech during which Reagan would announce the negotiating position, did the Foreign Office learn that Reagan had opted for the strict zero-only option.[66] Haig’s lackluster performance in successive NSC meetings, the smug disregard that the hard-liners showed towards European concerns, and Reagan’s own enthusiasm for the simplicity and abolitionist potential of the zero option had tipped the balance in the Pentagon’s favor.

The episode was a galling reminder of the limitations to Britain’s insight and influence in Washington, at least when it came to arms control. Despite repeated reassurances from Haig over the summer that the Reagan Administration “would not play the Carter game of presenting its allies with *faits accomplis* on vital issues,” Britain had no warning and was given no choice but to accept the zero option.[67] Officials had held back from playing Britain’s trump card—Thatcher’s relationship with Reagan—out of the mistaken belief that the Americans would endorse the Allied consensus already reached on zero plus. With little leverage over the Pentagon, the Foreign Office was dependent upon the State Department to make the running. Consequently, Britain was subject to, and ultimately found itself the victim of, interagency dynamics beyond its control.

Only the day before Reagan’s speech, at a briefing ahead of the Anglo-German Summit, Thatcher had:

62 TNA, FCO46/2704, French Nuclear Forces, Gillmore to PS/SoS, September 18, 1981.

63 TNA, FCO46/2704, UK Summary Record of the Special Consultative Group Meeting in Brussels, 16 September 1981, October 24, 1981.

64 TNA, FCO46/2706, TNF, Washington to FCO TELNO 3366, November 10, 1981.

65 TNA, FCO46/2707, Prime Minister’s Briefing Meeting for Bonn Summit: TNF, Gillmore to PS/PUS, November 17, 1981.

66 TNA, FCO46/2707, Press Conference in Bonn: President Reagan on TNF, FCO to Bonn TELNO 508, November 18, 1981.

67 TNA, FCO46/2703, Record of a Meeting between the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and the United States Secretary of State: State Department, Washington, Friday 17 July 1981.

expressed some misgivings about the zero option which she thought might be defined by some of our allies as meaning a good deal more than zero for the Russians. She thought, in particular, that it would be a mistake to create public expectations which would lead to widespread disappointment when they were unfulfilled.[68]

Nonetheless, Thatcher did not just acquiesce to the zero option; she championed European support for a negotiating position that she hoped would never come to pass.[69] At a joint press conference with Schmidt only a few hours after Reagan's speech, the Prime Minister welcomed the zero option as "a most important initiative" offering the prospect of "massive reductions" in nuclear arms.[70] Why the apparent contradiction?

As she attests in her memoirs, Thatcher's approach to the Anglo–American special relations was heavily shaped by the Suez Crisis of 1956, when Britain and France failed ignominiously to recapture the Suez Canal from the Egyptians, in large part thanks to American opposition. She drew the lesson from Suez that it was vitally important that Britain should never be at odds with the Americans over an issue at which Britain's vital interests were at stake.[71] Britain's influence in Washington stemmed ultimately from its loyalty and reliability. "We in Britain stand with you," Thatcher declared during her first visit to see Reagan as President. "Your problems will be our problems, and when you look for friends we will be there."[72] As important as INF modernization and the adoption of a credible negotiating position were to Britain, Britain's preeminent national interest was the exclusion of its strategic deterrent from the negotiations. Britain had pursued its objections to the zero option with tact and discretion, but in the end the British had lost the argument. The Americans had committed to protecting Britain's deterrent in the full knowledge that this would complicate negotiations, and that not all Allies would agree. Britain's duty in return, Thatcher felt, was to accept the outcome with loyalty and good grace, to welcome the zero option, and to continue the role of "staunch and dependable" ally, presenting a common front with the United States, and resolving any outstanding disagreements privately.

68 TNA, FCO46/2707, SCG Meeting on 20 November: The Zero Option, Gillmore to PS/SoS, November 18, 1981.

69 Thatcher, The Downing Street Years, p. 771.

70 TNA, FCO46/2707, Reagan's Speech on Disarmament, November 18, 1981.

71 "I drew four lessons from this sad episode. First, we should not get into a military operation unless we were determined and able to finish it. Second, we should never again find ourselves on the opposite side to the United States in a major international crisis affecting British interests. Third, we should ensure that our actions were in accord with international law. And finally, he who hesitates is lost." Margaret Thatcher, The Path to Power, London 1995, p. 88.

72 Robin Renwick, A Journey with Margaret Thatcher. Foreign Policy under the Iron Lady, London 2013, pp. 127 f.

4. The Interim Option

When the chief U.S. negotiator, Paul Nitze, formally tabled the zero option at the start of the negotiations on November 30, 1981 his negotiating instructions contained no fall-back options.[73] Privately, Nitze, the State Department, and the Foreign Office doubted the long-term viability of the zero option.[74] Gillmore recognized that with such a sharp disparity between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in terms of the number of deployed INF systems, the U.S. would need to pursue equal levels above zero—a so-called "interim option"—if any INF agreement was to be reached. The question was when, not if, to make a move in the Allies' negotiating position. Until NATO convinced the Soviets that deployment would proceed as planned, the Soviets would not negotiate seriously and would only pocket any premature concessions that the Allies made. Assuming that the "Russians were to sit on their hands for the rest of 1982 […] any changes in the NATO position had to be produced very sparingly."[75] The Allies should retain the zero option for the foreseeable future; the Americans agreed.

Although sticking with the zero option made sense diplomatically, it also meant that the Allies ceded the initiative to the Soviets, putting NATO at a disadvantage when it came to the battle for hearts and minds in Western Europe. The Soviets proved adept at making frequent presentational changes to their negotiating position, which gave the appearance of activism and accommodation without making their proposals any more attractive to the Allies.[76] Nonetheless, European public opinion began to turn against the zero option; opponents viewed the all-or-nothing approach as evidence that the Americans were not taking the negotiations seriously.[77] By mid-1982, with the two sides little closer after six months of negotiation, pressure began to build within the Alliance for the Americans to show greater "flexibility" in its negotiating position. British and French nuclear systems continued to be a focus of Soviet propaganda and were at the core of the Soviet negotiating position.[78] The Soviets continued to stress that a balance already existed in Europe, and that NATO's superiority in European-based systems, including the British and French strategic deterrents, legitimized deployments of the SS-20. In Brussels, Britain circulated paper after

73 Glitman, Last Battle, p. 61.
74 Glitman, Last Battle, p. 74.
75 TNA, FCO46/3094, Call on Mr Hurd by Ambassador Paul Nitze: 5.30 PM, 17 March 1982, March 19, 1982.
76 Glitman, Last Battle, p. 83.
77 TNA, FCO46/3136, Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control: The State of the Debate in the FRG, Mallaby to Gillmore, September 15, 1982.
78 TNA, FCO46/3085, Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces, Moscow to FCO TELNO 117, March 5, 1982.

paper challenging Soviet claims.[79] These efforts did not prevent critics, including the architects of *Ostpolitik*, Willy Brandt and Egon Bahr, from echoing Soviet calls for compensation for British and French forces and the cancellation of NATO deployments in return for marginal reductions in Soviet systems. In September 1982, the British Minister in Bonn, Christopher Mallaby, reported that the popular interpretation of "flexibility" and zero plus in SPD circles was for NATO to allow the Soviets to keep some SS-20s as compensation for the British and French deterrents.[80]

In June 1982, Schmidt concluded that an interim option was required to head off the opposition from within his own party to INF modernization, which threatened to topple his fragile coalition. The FCO deemed the call for an interim option ill-timed, if not ill-judged. "It would be profoundly damaging," Gillmore believed, "if the Alliance was to work itself now into a state of jitters […] It is probably right that the zero/zero outcome is not negotiable."[81] However, the timing of any move "will be of the essence […] There must be no question of considering alternatives to zero until [the Soviets] have displayed a greater readiness to approach the INF negotiations with a real intent to negotiate for a sensible result."[82] The Americans agreed with Gillmore's analysis and rejected Schmidt's proposed interim option.

Nonetheless, the FCO found the growing frequency of U.S.–German interactions disquieting. In September 1982, Gillmore's deputy, John Weston, learned that Nitze would be:

> having a private exchange of views with the leader of the Soviet delegation […] before going on to 'brief the Germans over the weekend' […] It is perhaps perfectly natural that Nitze should be making a point of keeping the Germans closely informed at this very fluid juncture in the German political scene. But we shall presumably wish to ensure that US/German bilateral contacts on INF do not assume the proportions of a 'special relationship'.[83]

Signs that Nitze was "finding it more difficult to deal conceptually with the problem of the exclusion of allied systems in INF" only made the FCO more nervous about where a U.S.–German special relationship could lead, and the other concessions Schmidt might feel forced to make to shore up his governing coalition.[84] In order to safeguard its independent deterrent, Britain needed to strengthen its own special relationship with the Americans, and to make

79 TNA, FCO46/2729, Analysis of Soviet Claims on the Balance of Nuclear Forces in Europe, June 30, 1981.

80 TNA, FCO46/3136, Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control: The State of the Debate in the FRG, Mallaby to Gillmore, September 15, 1982.

81 TNA, FCO46/3097, INF, Gillmore to Mallaby, October 4, 1982.

82 Ibid.

83 TNA, FCO46/3097, US/German Relations, Weston to Gillmore, September 28, 1982.

84 TNA, FCO46/3101, INF Et al, Renwick to Gillmore, October 22, 1982.

preparations for a positive shift in the negotiating position. In September 1982, Gillmore broached the subject of Anglo–American collaboration on preparing fall-back options with Richard Burt, Eagleburger's successor as Chair of the SCG.[85] Gillmore stressed the "great difficulty" they would have in discussing possible alternatives to the zero option:

since, as soon as any whiff of it leaked out, the present position would be untenable. If some forward thinking were not done, however, we could find ourselves in real difficulty next year; and could come under sudden and intense pressure from the Germans to make some move which might not be well considered or make much sense in terms of arms control.[86]

Burt had been one of the leading proponents of zero plus, and remained sore about losing the interagency debate to Perle the previous November. Burt welcomed the opportunity to work with Britain, believing that cooperation, if handled carefully, could help strengthen the State Department's hand within the interagency process.[87] Perle and the hard-liners were already in a weaker position than they had been in November 1981. The Administration faced not just growing pressure from the Europeans but calls from Congress to accept a "nuclear freeze."[88] According to one FCO desk officer, the European Allies could be forgiven if they found themselves "unable, privately at least, to resist a feeling of relief that the American Administration is now having a first-hand taste of the sort of public pressure which the European Governments have faced for several years."[89]

Nitze shared Burt's frustration with the stalemate in Geneva. In early October 1982, the FCO learned that in July Nitze had established on his own authority a private back-channel to sound out the Soviets about a possible interim option, the so-called "Walk in the Woods."[90] Although the White House rejected Nitze's proposal (thanks in part to Perle) the new U.S. Secretary of State, George Shultz, supported Nitze's efforts to find a compromise.[91] Burt hoped that with British help he could get Shultz to approve the development of fall-back options for use in 1983. Having sounded out Perle and learned that even he "acknowledged that an Allied move was likely to be necessary" at some point, the FCO felt confident to press the matter with Shultz.[92] Indeed, the FCO regarded Pym's meeting with Shultz on December 17, 1982 as of "critical importance" in helping the Department of State "break the log-jam in Washington […] [N]o voice is likely to weigh

85 TNA, FCO46/3097, INF and START, Renwick to Gillmore, September 3, 1982.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 On Freeze in the U.S. see Claudia Kemper's essay in this volume.
89 TNA, FCO46/3143, Congressional Proposal for a Nuclear Freeze, Gozney to Pakenham, April 2, 1982.
90 TNA, FCO46/3101, INF, Renwick to Gillmore, October 7, 1982.
91 Ibid.
92 TNA, FCO46/3101, INF, Renwick to Gillmore, December 11, 1982.

more persuasively in the matter than that of the United Kingdom."[93] Although Shultz was not prepared to countenance a shift in NATO's public position in the immediate future, since the Soviets had made no meaningful concessions of their own, he recognized that it would be "irresponsible for the Americans not to think about other positions behind closed doors."[94] Burt was ecstatic and thanked Gillmore profusely for Britain's help in winning over Shultz.[95]

It was against this background of delicate engagement with the U.S. about possible fall-back options that the Defence Secretary, John Nott, wrote his letter to Thatcher calling for a "British initiative" on arms control.[96] The idea Nott had in mind was a move to reduce the number and salience of tactical nuclear weapons in NATO's posture, not a move on INF. Nonetheless, the FCO remained cautious about any effort that could be perceived as placing "semi-public pressure on the Americans to move" lest this detract from Britain's role as the "most staunch and dependable of the allies", and thus undermine British influence in Washington.[97] The irony was that the FCO rejected calls from MOD for an early move on arms control precisely because the FCO wished to persuade the Americans to be ready to make a move on INF in early 1983. The FCO's analysis of the zero option had never changed. The interim option had always been a question of when, not if.

By January 1983, the British had concluded that the time for a move in the negotiating position was fast approaching. This was not because they felt that the Allies had succeeded in demonstrating to the Soviets their resolve to see through the deployments. Rather it was because public support for deployment was looking increasingly vulnerable. In particular, a new, more credible negotiating position could help to head off calls from the likes of Bahr for a one-year postponement in deployment in order to allow additional time for negotiation.[98] The British feared that postponement, even for a year, would undermine the momentum then building behind deployment, perhaps fatally. Indeed, the Soviets were quick to capitalize on the growing opposition throughout Western Europe to deployment by announcing a new negotiating position of their own. On December 21, 1982, the new General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Yuri Andropov, gave a speech in which he labeled the zero option a "mockery".[99] In its place, he offered his own interim option, whereby the Soviet Union would retain in Europe only as many medium-range missiles as Britain and France already possessed "and not a single one more". By making this new

93 TNA, FCO46/3101, Shultz Visit: Separate Brief on INF, Weston to PS/SoS, December 14, 1982.

94 TNA, FCO46/3101, Visit of Mr Shultz: INF, Fall to Gillmore, December 17, 1982.

95 TNA, FCO46/3101, INF: Discussions with Shultz on 17 December, FCO to Washington TELNO 2178, December 17, 1982.

96 TNA, PREM19/979, FCO46/3101, Nuclear Issues, Nott to Thatcher, October 20, 1982.

97 TNA, FCO46/3101, INF, Renwick to Gillmore, December 11, 1982.

98 TNA, FCO46/3519, Your TELNO 627 to Washington: CBS Television Debate: Egon Bahr, Bonn to FCO TELNO 373, April 15, 1983.

99 Ibid.

offer, Andropov had attempted to portray the issue of British and French nuclear forces as the main obstacle to progress in the negotiations. This alone gave Britain every reason to want the U. S. to announce their own interim option.

By February 1983, Britain, along with the majority of the other European Allies, had concluded that the time had arrived for the U. S. to offer an interim option. However, FCO officials cautioned against putting collective pressure on the Administration to change track. The Reagan Administration already had a strong tendency to view defense issues through a domestic political lens; the challenge posed by the FREEZE Movement only exacerbated this. Gillmore argued that "if it was believed that the Europeans were 'ganging up' on the Administration in order to encourage a new initiative in the negotiations, this would merely serve the arguments of those who oppose any shift from the zero option, even on an interim base."[100] It was for this reason that, on January 24, Pym declined an invitation from Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the German Foreign Minister, to meet with their Italian counterpart to discuss INF. Later Pym persuaded Genscher not to lobby the Americans for an early NATO Foreign Ministers' meeting to discuss INF for the same reason.[101] Nonetheless, in making the case to the Americans for an interim option, German support would be key. The new German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, favored an interim option, but wished to delay any move until after the Federal Elections.[102] "[F]ighting for his political life", the FDP leader, Genscher, did not want the Americans to wait any longer.[103]

Their determination to avoid ganging up on the Americans did not preclude the British from lobbying the Administration bilaterally or continuing to collaborate on the development of fall-back options. On February 18, Thatcher wrote to Reagan, warning that the recent public revelations about the Walk in the Woods, had "aroused public expectations that we are now considering the possibility of an intermediate step on the road to our final objective, the zero outcome."[104] Reagan himself needed little convincing. On January 27, the British Embassy in Washington reported that the "President's own inclination was towards some flexibility".[105] However, Reagan was "reluctant to force the issue with Weinberger", and "Shultz did not want to bring the matter to a head until he was convinced that there was no alternative".[106] By the time Vice-President Bush visited London on February 9,

100 TNA, FCO46/3470, INF: Mr Pym's Contacts with Mr Genscher and Sr Colombo in the Margins of the European Council: 24/25 January, Gillmore to PS/SoS, undated.

101 TNA, FCO46/3470, INF: Mr Pym's Contacts with Mr Genscher and Sr Colombo in the Margins of the European Council: 24/25 January, Gillmore to PS/SoS, undated; TNA, FCO 46/3470, INF, FCO to Bonn TELNO 36, January 25, 1983.

102 TNA, FCO46/3518, MIPT: INF: Nitze's Talks in Bonn on 24 January, Bonn to FCO TELNO 076, January 25, 1983.

103 TNA, FCO46/3518, Your TELNO 46: Visit of Chancellor Kohl (and Herr Genscher) to Chequers, 4 February, Bonn to FCO TELNO 112, February 2, 1983.

104 TNA, PREM 19/979, Thatcher to Reagan, February 18, 1983.

105 TNA, FCO46/3471, INF, Renwick to British Minister, Washington, January 27, 1983.

106 Ibid.

opinion in Washington had begun to shift; "some of the staunchest opponents to any move from the zero option within the Administration now appear to accept that a new initiative […] may now be inescapable."[107] Even amongst the NSC Staff, there were those who recognized that the United States would have to "work very hard to combat the prevailing view here and abroad that R[onald]R[eagan] is not serious about arms control, won't compromise, that the policy is in disarray with major splits in the Administration."[108]

Against this background, Pym seized the opportunity presented by the Vice-President's visit to tell Bush that "[i]n the UK view, the moment to move from the zero option might be very close, although […] it might be best to leave it until after the FRG elections."[109] In his report to Shultz, Burt recounted the conversation somewhat differently: "Pym was brutal in asserting that zero/zero is unobtainable and has outrun its political usefulness."[110] Despite Weinberger's continued opposition to any move away from zero, Burt reassured British officials that the President had given Shultz the authority to conduct a prompt review of the U. S. negotiating position.[111]

Although welcome, talk of a prompt review brought back bad memories of when Allied consultation had broken down shortly before Reagan had first announced the zero option.[112] Gillmore was determined to avoid a repeat: "It is of course important not to nag the Americans unnecessarily. But under the pressure of time, proper consultations could become a casualty".[113] Gillmore received additional justification for his concerns when, on March 23, President Reagan announced "his desire to move from a US strategy based on the deterrent effect of a retaliatory capability to one based on adequate anti-ballistic missile defences by pursuing the Strategic Defense Initiative."[114] The President's speech "came as a complete and unwelcome surprise" to many in his own Administration, let alone to his NATO Allies.[115]

The same day Reagan informed Thatcher of the results of Shultz's review: "the United States is prepared to negotiate an interim agreement".[116] Having lost the argument in Washington, Perle was furious with what he regarded as British interference. On the margins of the Nuclear Planning Group on March 23,

107 TNA, PREM 19/973, INF: The Zero Option, Bone to Coles, February 9, 1983.
108 RRPL, NSC Subject File, Arms Control (1 Jan 83–20 Jan 83), Arms Control Public Affairs, Allin to Clark and McFarlane, January 13, 1983.
109 TNA, PREM 19/973, Secretary of State's discussion with Vice-President Bush: 9 February: Defence Issues, Bone to Coles, February 9, 1983.
110 National Security Archive, Washington, An Overview of the Vice President's Talks in Europe on INF, U. S. Embassy London to U. S. Secretary of State, February 10, 1983.
111 Ibid.
112 TNA, PREM 19/979, Reagan to Thatcher, March 14, 1983.
113 TNA, FCO46/3472, UKDel NATO Telegram Number 83: INF, FCO to Washington TELNO 469, March 21, 1983.
114 TNA, FCO46/3472, SITREP 14–25 March, Weston to Wright, March 24, 1983.
115 Ibid.
116 TNA, PREM 19/979, Reagan to Thatcher, March 23, 1983.

Perle opened a meeting with his MOD counterpart "with a heated denunciation of what the British were up to in, as he saw it, mobilizing European opinion to apply pressure on the US Administration to make a move in the INF arms control negotiations."[117] Gillmore put Perle's outburst down to him being "aggrieved at having lost the battle in Washington in spite of having spilt a good deal of blood on a large number of carpets. But then we are all getting used to that."[118]

Did Perle overstate Britain's influence? Certainly, there is little evidence to suggest that the British perfidiously masterminded a conspiracy by the European Allies to lobby the Reagan Administration to pursue an interim option. Indeed, the British had actively discouraged attempts by Genscher and others to mount such a coordinated lobbying campaign.[119] However, Perle had stronger grounds to allege that the Foreign Office had been "ganging up with the State Department in some way" even if this fell short of the "unfair pressure" Perle claimed that the British had placed on the interagency decision-making process.[120] Behind the scenes, FCO officials had been working hard with Burt and his team for nearly six months, exploring alternative interim options. In so doing, the British were able to inject their thinking at the very earliest stage of the American policy development process. In parallel, at the political level, Pym engaged with Secretary Shultz, and Thatcher kept up a regular correspondence with President Reagan. In short, the British had learnt the lesson from the zero option debacle "that dealing with the State Department is no substitute for more widespread exchanges; and that views delivered early carry twice the weight of those that come later."[121]

Some in the Reagan Administration, like Perle, grated at "the role the British cherish: to straddle the differences between the U. S. and Europe."[122] However, the MOD was confident that HMG had pursued the "right" approach:

> [T]he most productive way of seeking to influence US thinking has been to feed in the UK view through intensive contact between senior US officials and our Chargé [d'Affairs] in Washington […] [W]e have been consequently taken into the confidence of State Department officials as their thinking develops and I doubt whether this would have happened if Mr Shultz or the President had been responding [only] to high level messages from us. There is no doubt that our views are respected and carefully listened to.[123]

117 TNA, FCO46/3472, Blelloch to Gillmore, March 25, 1983.
118 TNA, FCO46/3072, INF: Richard Perle, Gillmore to Blelloch, March 29, 1983.
119 TNA, FCO46/3470, INF: Mr Pym's Contacts with Mr Genscher and Sr Colombo in the Margins of the European Council: 24/25 January, Gillmore to PS/SoS, undated.
120 TNA, FCO46/3472, Blelloch to Gillmore, March 25, 1983.
121 TNA, PREM 19/1690, European Public Opinion and Nuclear Weapons, Howe to Thatcher, December 9, 1983.
122 Ronald Reagan Presidential Library (RRPL), NSC European and Security Affairs Directorate, RAC Box 6, United Kingdom 1983 (06-03-83–06-15-83), Your June 16 Meeting with David Gillmore, Sommer to McFarlane, June 15, 1983.
123 TNA, DEFE 24/2998, INF Negotiations—Development of the US Negotiating Position, Stewart to Assistant PS to the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, August 31, 1983.

Were the British any more influential in Washington than their European Allies because they adopted this approach? Like any success, the interim option had many parents. The Italians were quick to claim their share of responsibility for the move.[124] However, Kohl's views about the timing of any move were unquestionably the single biggest factor weighing upon American decision-making once the President had accepted the need for greater flexibility in the U. S. negotiating position. Nonetheless, Burt believed that when it came to INF both "the FRG and Britain are the crucial countries"; indeed, Burt argued that the U. S. "should put special weight on what was heard in London."[125] While other Allies "are reluctant to offer us advice on sensitive nuclear matters", the British "rely on the 'special relationship' and are always more candid. They view themselves as 'explaining Europe to the Americans and vice versa'".[126] British intervention may not have influenced the timing of Reagan's announcement. However, FCO officials kept up their quiet, but consistent engagement with their counterparts in the State Department, conveying the message, echoed by Pym and Thatcher, that a move of some sort, early in 1983, would be essential if the U. S. were to maintain Allied support for deployment. It was, in no small part, thanks to this that President Reagan reluctantly took on the hard-liners within his Administration, and decided to pursue an interim option.

5. The Zero Option Redux

As NATO's self-imposed deadline of December 31, 1983 either to reach an arms control agreement or to begin NATO deployment fast approached, the interim option underwent several further revisions. These modifications of NATO's negotiating position pushed the zero option further into the distance, although it remained ostensibly the Allies' ultimate objective in the negotiations. When the first NATO deployments began in November 1983 and the Soviets subsequently walked out of the negotiations in Geneva, the zero option was effectively dead. Coming on the back of the Soviet shoot-down of Korean Airlines Flight 007, and the concern provoked in the Kremlin by the NATO command exercise, ABLE ARCHER 83, East–West relations reached a new nadir.[127]

When the INF negotiations finally resumed in Geneva on March 12, 1985, under the umbrella of the expanded Nuclear-Space Talks, the prospect of an

124 Negoziato FNI di Genevri, prepared for a meeting between Italian Prime Minister Craxi and Chancellor Kohl on September 23, 1983. Quoted in Leopoldo Nuti, Italy and the Battle of the Euromissiles: The Deployment of the US BGM-109 G 'Gryphon' 1979–83, in: Olav Njølstad (ed.), The Last Decade of the Cold War. From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Transformation, London 2004, p. 292.

125 National Security Archive, An Overview of the Vice President's Talks in Europe on INF, U. S. Embassy London to U. S. Secretary of State, February 10, 1983.

126 Ibid.

127 Taylor Downing, 1983. The World at the Brink, London 2018.

INF agreement, let alone the zero option, appeared little closer. Indeed, the linkage established between the arms control negotiations in Geneva had tied the fate of the INF negotiations to that of START and the outer space tasks. The British had long argued against the merger of INF and START for fear that it would undermine their argument that, as strategic systems "by definition", the British and French strategic deterrents "had no place in the INF negotiations."[128] However, in February 1984, Sir Geoffrey Howe, the new Foreign Secretary, wrote to Thatcher, saying that for the sake of East–West relations "if a genuine opportunity presents itself for the resumption of nuclear arms control […] the West should be in a position to respond positively without pre-conditions".[129] The U. S. ended up accepting the merger of INF, START, and the outer space talks as the price of resuming negotiations with the Soviets. However, Maynard Glitman, Nitze's successor as the chief U. S. negotiator for INF, believed that linkage had presented the Soviets with only greater opportunity to present "Alliance-splitting proposals", and to sabotage SDI. Only by unravelling this grand package, Glitman argued, could progress in the INF negotiations be made.[130] Thatcher's advisor for foreign affairs, Sir Percy Craddock, agreed.[131]

Rather than the threat that linkage posed to SDI, Thatcher was more concerned about the threat that SDI posed to the progress of nuclear arms control. Thatcher agreed with her private secretary, Charles Powell, that "the key is […] not to allow" the Americans to make "any irrevocable decisions affecting deployment of an SDI which would sabotage the short-term possibilities of limiting and reducing nuclear arms."[132] To that end, on December 22, 1984 at Camp David, Thatcher secured President Reagan's commitment that while research into ballistic missile defence could proceed unconstrained, any deployment of SDI-type capabilities would be subject to negotiations.[133] Shultz regarded the joint statement that Powell drafted and that Reagan and Thatcher issued after the meeting as "excellent" since it neatly "bypassed" opposition from Weinberger and the Pentagon to any aspect of the SDI program being subject to negotiation.[134]

Linkage and SDI were not the only potential obstacles to progress in the INF negotiations. The U. S. and Soviet negotiating positions remained far apart, with

128 TNA, PREM 19/1443, Implications of a Merger of INF/START Negotiations, January 7, 1985.

129 TNA, PREM 19/1184, INF/START Merger, Howe to Thatcher, February 10, 1984.

130 Glitman, Last Battle, p. 108.

131 TNA, PREM 19/1443, Prime Minister's Meeting with Mr McFarlane: US/Soviet Talks on Arms Control, Powell to Ricketts, January 9, 1985.

132 TNA, PREM 19/1443, Arms Control: Briefing Meeting, Chequers, 2 February, Powell to Thatcher, handwritten annex, January 31, 1985.

133 RRPL, European and Soviet Affairs Directorate, NSC: Records (File Folder: Thatcher Visit—Dec 1984 [1] Box 90902), Meeting with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, December 28, 1984, https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/109185 (accessed on March 12, 2020).

134 George Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph. My Years as Secretary of State, New York 1993, p. 509.

little obvious way of bridging them.[135] Despite NATO's ongoing modernization program, the Soviets continued to possess a significant superiority in the number of deployed INF systems and understandably remained deeply opposed to making the disproportionate reductions that parity in intermediate-range missiles would have entailed. Finally, and most troubling for the British, the Soviets continued to claim that third-party systems must be taken into account in the negotiations.[136] Although Reagan reassured Thatcher that the U. S. would continue to reject any such proposals, this did not preclude the new General-Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev proposing that Britain and the Soviet Union engage in a "direct dialogue" to discuss the "nuclear balance in Europe".[137] Nor did it stop Nitze, now Reagan's special advisor for arms control, suggesting that Britain and France would participate in multilateral talks once the superpowers had made 50 % reductions in their strategic arsenals, a prospect that both Britain and France strenuously opposed.[138]

Only when Gorbachev made successive unilateral concessions were the obstacles to progress in the INF negotiations removed. When he met Reagan for the first time at Geneva, Gorbachev indicated that a separate agreement on INF might be possible.[139] On January 14, 1986, Gorbachev wrote to Thatcher, in parallel to other Allied leaders, setting out a dramatic proposal to eliminate all nuclear weapons within 15 years.[140] Dismissing much of it as propaganda, the British Embassy in Moscow commented that "[t]he most striking feature of Gorbachev's programme is the apparent acceptance […] of the original US 'zero option' on INF", albeit only in Europe, not in Asia.[141] By making disarmament conditional upon the U. S. renouncing space weapons, the main target of Gorbachev's dramatic initiative was clearly SDI. However, his proposal also came with the condition that the U. S. would agree not to transfer strategic or medium-range systems to other countries, which "would seem at least to catch the Trident programme".[142] More positively, Gorbachev appeared to have dropped "demands for compensation for third country systems", and to have accepted the principle of superpower, rather than bloc, parity.[143] Nonetheless, in order to maintain a common front against the inclusion of their systems in the negotiations, the

135 TNA, PREM 19/1443, Background Note: INF, undated.

136 TNA, PREM 19/1693, Gorbachev to Reagan, September 12, 1985.

137 TNA, PREM 19/1443, Outcome of Geneva Talks: Soviet View, Budd to Powell, January 16, 1985; TNA, PREM 19/1443, Reagan to Thatcher, January 5, 1985; TNA, PREM 19/1693, Gorbachev to Thatcher, October 12, 1985.

138 TNA, PREM 19/1695, Arms Control: Prime Minister's Discussion with Ambassador Nitze, Powell to Culshaw, July 23, 1986.

139 Glitman, The Last Battle, p. 117.

140 TNA, PREM 19/1693, Gorbachev to Thatcher, January 14, 1986.

141 TNA, PREM 19/1693, My TELNO 057: Gorbachev's Statement on Arms Control, Moscow to FCO, TELNO 066, January 16, 1986.

142 Ibid.

143 TNA, PREM 19/1693, Your TELNO 83, Gorbachev Proposals on Arms Control, Washington to FCO, TELNO 153, January 22, 1986.

British stepped up cooperation with the French, who were, if anything, even more hostile towards Reagan and Gorbachev's shared dream of a world without nuclear weapons than Thatcher was.[144]

At the same time, the British continued to work hard to maintain their influence upon American thinking. With the zero option having resurfaced as a serious prospect following Gorbachev's January 1986 disarmament initiative, Thatcher told Nitze that she continued to have "misgivings" about the elimination of INF since "it would call into question the NATO decision to deploy Pershing II and Cruise missiles as an essential part of the Alliance's spectrum of nuclear deterrents [sic]."[145] Ultimately, Thatcher was reluctant to give up systems that she believed plugged an important gap in NATO's nuclear posture, and that she had expended considerable political capital to deploy. On February 11, 1986, Thatcher wrote to Reagan to share her views on Gorbachev's proposals, and to reiterate her "anxieties about your ideas on INF", namely the President's apparent interest in accepting Gorbachev's proposal for a zero option in Europe as a stepping-stone towards his wider goal of nuclear abolition. She hoped "that our experts can stay closely in touch on this as well as on wider issues."[146] To this end, Howe sent Shultz a 15-page paper that set out the Prime Minister's "own detailed ideas" on how to handle SDI and the negotiations in Geneva.[147] In parallel, Howe wrote to Shultz, expressing his hope that the Americans would "bear in mind our continued preference for an agreement which would take account of the military rationale for the Alliance decision to deploy" INF, i. e. the interim option.[148]

Whilst the FRG was "unconditionally in favour" of pursuing the zero option, if need be only in Europe, the other basing nations, France, and Japan shared Thatcher's misgivings.[149] "[T]he strength of Allied and Japanese objections" prompted an intense interagency debate about how best to respond to Gorbachev's proposals for INF.[150] Eventually, the President retreated from his initial decision to accept Gorbachev's proposal of a zero option only in Europe, not in Asia.[151] Instead, Reagan reaffirmed his original position that any zero option pursued would need to be on a global basis; failing that, only an interim agreement that preserved some INF in Europe would be possible.[152]

144 TNA, PREM 19/1693, Bilateral Talks on Nuclear Matters, Paris to FCO, TELNO 91, January 24, 1986.
145 TNA, PREM 19/1693, Prime Minister's Meeting with Ambassador Nitze, Powell to Appleyard, February 5, 1986.
146 TNA, PREM 19/1693, Thatcher to Reagan, February 11, 1986.
147 TNA, PREM 19/1693, Howe to Shultz, draft, February 10, 1986.
148 Ibid.
149 TNA, PREM 19/1693, SCG Quint Meeting, 12 February, UKDel NATO to FCO, TELNO 48, February 12, 1986.
150 Ibid.
151 TNA, PREM 19/1693, Reagan to Thatcher, February 22, 1986.
152 Ibid.

Thatcher was reassured by, if not entirely satisfied with, the President's reversal, the product of what Sir Oliver Wright, the British Ambassador to Washington, described as "[f]or once [...] a genuine consultation exercise."[153] However, this episode turned out to be the high watermark of British and Allied influence upon American policy towards the INF negotiations. In a prescient statement a year before, Wright had warned: "[w]hile we can reasonably expect to be kept in close touch with the strategy and tactics and the course of the negotiations as they proceed, we cannot expect that the hand will be necessarily played our way."[154] Betraying his growing exasperation with the Americans' handling of the chemical weapons negotiations and their decision no longer to respect the SALT II constraints, in May 1986, Howe advocated taking a more distinctive British approach to arms control, including strengthening cooperation with Britain's European Allies, and trumpeting the efforts that the British made behind the scenes. Although this approach might not increase British influence over the arms control process, Howe believed that it would help to ensure that Britain received greater credit publicly for the contributions it made, and to make it less vulnerable to the charge of slavishly supporting American policy.[155] Powell and the Prime Minister, however, were quick to dismiss Howe's suggestion, claiming that "[t]here is nothing to gain from swapping discreet but real influence over the US for hortatory European statements", particularly when it was the Americans, not the Europeans, who were participating in the arms control negotiations.[156] "The best way to maintain our record", Powell believed, "is to continue to come forward with practical proposals, even if relatively modest ones, which will nudge arms control negotiations steadily forward."[157] Although this approach had proven successful to date—none more so than with the interim option—the British government soon experienced its limitations. As the pace of the INF negotiations increased, so the opportunities diminished for the British to inject their thinking privately at an early stage of deliberations in Washington. Likewise, the risk grew that the British might be rudely surprised.

Looking ahead to Reykjavik, Thatcher told Reagan on February 22, 1986 that she believed that Gorbachev would "come to your next Summit without any serious expectation of reaching definitive agreements on the main arms control issues". Rather, Gorbachev's purpose might "be to spin out negotiations in the hope of being able to rely on a steadily mounting volume of pressure from

153 TNA, PREM 19/1693, My TELNO 270: Arms Control: US Response to Gorbachev's 15 January Proposals, Washington to FCO, TELNO 383, February 14, 1986.

154 TNA, PREM 19/1443, My TELNO 24: Shultz/Gromyko Meeting, Washington to FCO, January 7, 1985.

155 TNA, PREM 19/1694, Arms Control and the UK Contribution, Howe to Thatcher, May 16, 1986.

156 TNA, PREM 19/1694, Arms Control, Powell to Thatcher, May 16, 1986.

157 TNA, PREM 19/1694, Arms Control and the UK Contribution, Powell to Galsworthy, May 18, 1986.

Western public opinion to remove the 'blockage' represented by the SDI."[158] Instead, Gorbachev arrived in Reykjavik with an even more ambitious set of proposals than his January 1986 disarmament initiative. To Thatcher's horror, President Reagan came close to agreeing to eliminate all ballistic missiles by the year 2000, and possibly all nuclear weapons within ten years, both of which would have put at risk the future of the British strategic deterrent.[159] Powell declared that the elimination of all nuclear weapons within ten years would be "devastating militarily and politically. One is tempted to say thank God for the Russians for having turned the proposal down."[160] The priority, in Powell's views, was to ensure that "the arms control process slow down, to give time to get the American proposal modified or knocked off the table". Nonetheless, it was important that the British not "be seen publicly to be blocking or slowing down progress".[161] When Reagan called to discuss the outcome of the Summit, Thatcher told him that he "had performed marvellously". However:

> 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.[162]

Inadvertently underscoring the different strategic calculations that underlay their thinking, Reagan replied that he did "not believe the conventional balance is so imbalanced." On a more positive note, Reagan reported that Gorbachev had appeared to accept that British and French nuclear forces could not be included in the INF negotiations, and that "it looked like we had the framework of an INF agreement".[163] However, the framework that Reagan described was very similar to the Europe-only zero option that Gorbachev had offered in January, which the British and other Allies had lobbied the Americans so strenuously to reject.

Days before the Reykjavik Summit, the Foreign and Defence Secretaries had been "concerned at the possibility of being placed in the position of being seen to be blocking […] agreement on low numbers for INF in Europe. This would be

158 TNA, PREM 19/1693, Thatcher to Reagan, February 11, 1986.

159 RRPL, Matlock MSS (Box 92140), Memorandum of Conversation, October 12, 1986, 3:25–6 PM, Hofdi House, Reykjavik, October 14, 1986, https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/109180 (accessed on March 14, 2020).

160 TNA, PREM 19/1695, Arms Control, Powell to Thatcher, October 14, 1986.

161 Ibid.

162 TNA, PREM 19/1759, Prime Minister's Talk with President Reagan, Powell to Budd, October 13, 1986. The White House record of the conversation (RRPL, Executive Secretariat, NSC: System File, 8607413, President's Telephone Conversation with Prime Minister Thatcher, October 13, 1986) described the elimination of all ballistic missiles as Reagan's proposals, and the elimination of all nuclear weapons as Gorbachev's; U. S. accounts of the Summit tell a different story.

163 RRPL, Executive Secretariat, NSC: System File, 8607413, President's Telephone Conversation with Prime Minister Thatcher, October 13, 1986.

especially damaging when we originally supported the zero-zero solution, and have supported the US search for equal ceilings at any level."[164] After Reykjavik, the dilemma facing the British was even starker. "[N]ow that proposals for zero-zero INF in Europe have been tabled publicly and apparently accepted in principle by the US and the Soviet Union," Powell noted, "it may well be that this is the only INF agreement on offer."[165] However, Ministers and officials quickly adjusted to the new reality, treating the pursuit of a separate INF agreement—if needs be, eliminating systems only in Europe—as a means of avoiding something much worse. On October 21, George Younger, Heseltine's successor as Defence Secretary, told Weinberger on the margins of the NPG at Gleneagles: "we could accept the zero solution for INF, but strategic weapons were another matter for us".[166] The British preference remained for an interim agreement that would preserve "some residual US LRINF deployment in Europe", especially "if the Russians were to insist on higher Asian SS-20 numbers".[167] However, Thatcher recognized that "a zero outcome for Europe […] must in the light of previous public statements be accepted by us if the Russians themselves are ready to accept it."[168]

Despite giving Shultz "unshirted hell" when she visited Washington on November 15, once Thatcher had secured renewed public assurances from Reagan at Camp David about the supply of Trident, and a restatement of the importance he attributed to nuclear deterrence, she reluctantly, if pragmatically, gave her assent to the elimination of all INF in Europe.[169] However, talk of a so-called "double zero" and the elimination of short-range INF as part of a broader agreement threatened to reinvigorate her concerns. On the one hand, a double zero would address the problem of potential Soviet circumvention. On the other, Thatcher feared that a double zero could yet become a triple zero, if the U.S. heeded calls from Chancellor Kohl and other European Allies to make large-scale reductions in NATO's arsenal of short-range, battlefield nuclear weapons. Having set out to plug a gap in NATO's "seamless web of deterrence", Thatcher feared that an INF Treaty could yet result in widening the gap in NATO's nuclear posture. However, having long publicly endorsed the zero option, the Prime Minister realized that she was not in a position to disavow it, nor to oppose a double zero. Instead, she sought to contain the risks that the two zeros presented. On the one hand, she accepted as a *fait accompli* an INF Treaty that codified a global double zero; on the other, she sought a commitment from President Reagan that NATO

164 TNA, PREM 19/1759, US–Soviet Meeting in Reykjavik: Message to President Reagan, Budd to Powell, October 3, 1986.

165 TNA, PREM 19/1695, Arms Control, Powell to Budd, October 16, 1986.

166 TNA, PREM 19/1759, Secretary of State's Meeting with Mr Weinberger in the Margin of the NPG at Gleneagles, 21st October: Note for the Record, October 21, 1986.

167 TNA, PREM 19/1759, Your TELNO 1822: Post-Reykjavik Arms Control Discussions, Washington to FCO TELNO 2703, October 23, 1986.

168 TNA, PREM 19/1759, Arms Control: UK/US Exchanges, Powell to Budd, October 23, 1986.

169 Charles Moore, Margaret Thatcher. The Authorized Biography. Volume Two: Everything She Wants, London 2015, pp. 605–609.

would modernize its remaining theater nuclear forces, and that there would be a renewed focus on conventional arms control. Events came to a head at the Venice G7 Summit on June 8, 1987, when Thatcher and Kohl clashed over dinner about the future of NATO's short-range nuclear forces. Reagan agreed with Kohl that disarmament should not stop with a double zero; however, greater progress was required first in controlling chemical weapons and conventional arms before a third zero could be entertained.[170] With that the path to an INF agreement lay open.

Shortly before the Washington Summit, at which Reagan and Gorbachev were to sign the INF Treaty, Powell wrote to Thatcher worried that Gorbachev's "willingness to stay longer in Washington if there were good prospects of reaching agreement on strategic nuclear weapons" risked "a replay of Reykjavik."[171] Ultimately, British concerns about the direction of U.S.–Soviet arms control proved overblown. Although it was undoubtedly a singular achievement that unlocked progress in other areas of East-West relations, in terms of nuclear arms control the INF Treaty proved something of a swansong for the Reagan Administration. As Reagan entered his final year in office, the impetus behind the arms control process began to slow, much to Thatcher's relief.

6. Conclusion

The Germans were right to observe that, as a nuclear power, Britain had "special interests" when it came to INF,[172] none more special than Britain's interest in preserving an independent strategic deterrent. Britain's approach towards the zero option was guided by its three overarching objectives for Dual-Track: to maintain Allied cohesion; to strengthen NATO's deterrence posture; and, above all, to ensure that the UK's nuclear capabilities remained outside any arms control negotiations. Britain played a leading role in encouraging the Reagan Administration to begin negotiations, in order to shore up European support for deployment. British officials tried to persuade the Americans to adopt zero plus, leaving open the possibility that some NATO INF would be preserved by an interim agreement. However, the British were caught out by the Pentagon's surprise embrace of the strict zero-only option, and Haig's clumsy politicking. In order to hold together a fraying Alliance and to repay American support for the exclusion of the British deterrent, Britain portrayed itself publicly as a resolute supporter of an Allied negotiating position about which it privately held deep

170 Charles Moore, Margaret Thatcher. The Authorized Biography. Volume Three: Herself Alone, London 2019, pp. 162–164.

171 TNA, PREM 19/2172, United States/Soviet Summit, Powell to Thatcher, November 27, 1987.

172 Pfeffer, German Veto of Nuclear Use from Federal German Territory, February 2, 1983, in: Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (AAPD) 1983, ed. by Tim Geiger, Matthias Peter, and Mechthild Lindemann, Munich 2014, Doc. 31, p. 156.

reservations, and which Thatcher hoped that "the Soviets would never accept".[173] Outwardly, Britain displayed instinctive Atlanticism, placing Allied consensus first, burying its private misgivings, and professing loyal support. However, the British were also motivated by self-interest. Supporting the zero option would help to preserve British influence in Washington, and thus protect Britain's preeminent national interest in the INF negotiations: the continued exclusion from the arms control process of Britain's independent strategic deterrent.

Despite growing pressure from the European Allies, the peace movement, and the U.S. Congress, American and British officials initially resisted calls for an interim option in the absence of compelling evidence that the Soviets were prepared to make meaningful concessions of their own. Nonetheless, Britain continued to regard the zero option as fundamentally un-negotiable, and feared that events might force NATO into an ill-considered move unless preparations were made first. To that end, the British proposed collaborating with the Americans on contingency plans for the inevitable shift in NATO's negotiating position towards an interim option.

Apart from a handful of routine exchanges at a ministerial level, in 1981–82 British engagement with the Americans on INF was conducted by officials. Although she had her misgivings, Thatcher did not confront Reagan about the zero option until much later. She was not above confrontation, as the Soviet gas pipeline episode showed; however, she learned of Reagan's decision to adopt the zero option too late for her to effect a reversal. British officials had not raised the matter with the Prime Minister sooner, in the mistaken belief that Reagan had decided in favor of zero plus. Nevertheless, had British officials learned of Reagan's decision in time, it is doubtful that they would have encouraged Thatcher to intervene. Given the limited prospects of the INF negotiations, the question of the U.S. negotiating position was simply not important enough to risk jeopardizing Allied unity, expending political capital, or squandering Britain's reputation for reliability. Ultimately, the probability that the Soviets would accept the zero option seemed remote in 1981–82, and the UK had already secured its key objective: American support for the exclusion of the British deterrent from the negotiations.

From 1983 onwards, Thatcher played a much more active role in the INF negotiations. First, in March 1983, she lobbied Reagan to pursue an interim option. Later, after Reykjavik, she urged the President to back away from his proposal to eliminate all ballistic missiles within ten years, and to focus instead upon achieving an INF agreement. In both cases, whilst the majority of Anglo-American engagement continued to be conducted by officials, the balance of interests had shifted towards prompt and direct Prime Ministerial intervention. In early 1983, Thatcher judged that it was essential for the U.S. to make a swift move in its negotiating position lest European public support for deployment be lost. Only by having adopted an interim option would the European public blame

173 Thatcher, The Downing Street Years, p. 472.

the Soviets, and not the exclusion of British and French nuclear forces, for the continuing stalemate in the negotiations.

When in early 1986 the zero option returned as a serious prospect, Thatcher continued to have serious misgivings about this outcome. However, these paled by comparison with her concerns about President Reagan's proposal to eliminate all ballistic missiles within ten years, which put at risk the future of the UK's strategic deterrent. With such fundamental interests at stake, Thatcher concluded that only her swift personal intervention with Reagan could avert catastrophe. Not even (or perhaps especially not) her Foreign Secretary, Geoffrey Howe, could be trusted with such a delicate mission. Ultimately, while she continued to harbor concerns about the impact it would have on NATO's deterrence posture, Thatcher viewed the zero option as the lesser evil, especially when compared to nuclear abolition. That she was successful in persuading Reagan to focus his attention on pursuing an INF agreement, and to park loftier ambitions only reinforced Thatcher's belief that her intervention had been critical.[174]

Nonetheless, the INF Treaty, and the Allied consultations that contributed to it, illustrate the limits as much as the extent of British influence upon American arms control policy. Ultimately, the British could live with the INF Treaty in the very different political climate presented by renewed East/West détente. However, the elimination of INF was at odds with Britain's primary objective at the time of the Dual-Track Decision, namely the strengthening of NATO's deterrence posture. Furthermore, the negotiating process had highlighted Britain's critical dependency upon the U.S. for the continued viability of its independent deterrent. Nonetheless, by refraining from airing their concerns publicly, and instead working with the Americans behind closed doors, the British had remained a staunch Ally, providing loyal, but not uncritical support to the Americans. Indeed, according to Chris Patten, then a junior Conservative minister, staunch was Thatcher's "favourite word", and the quality that she most prized in herself and others.[175] Despite narrowly avoiding catastrophe at Reykjavik, and ultimately having to acquiesce to the zero option, the British approach paid off. With the signing of the INF Treaty, Thatcher and her government had succeeded in protecting their most vital national interest—the exclusion of British nuclear forces from the arms control process—whilst helping to hold together the fragile North Atlantic Alliance, and to bring the Euromissile Crisis to a close.

174 Ibid., p. 473.
175 Moore, Thatcher, Vol 3, p. 767.