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BRITISH EMBASSY
WASHINGTON

reply to the latest Soviet note. Whatever it is, our reply will be something of a landmark in the history of our postwar relations with the Russians. The Foreign Secretary is consequently concerned that we should not allow ourselves to be rushed. He has asked me to put to you the suggestion that we need not draft our substantive reply until after the Prime Minister's visits to Paris and to Bonn and his discussions with the President. It could then be put to the North Atlantic Council when the Council meeting takes place in Washington in April and sent to the Russians after that. If it is desired to have a meeting of the four Foreign Ministers immediately before the North Atlantic Council meeting, no doubt we can agree. But we for our part would prefer to reserve judgment on this until later on.

If such a programme was acceptable we could get over the disadvantage of not sending an early substantive reply to the Russian note by sending a short acknowledgment. It might be to the effect that we are giving very careful study to the proposal and that it should be understood that the delay in sending a substantive reply is significant of the interest and importance which we attach to the Russian note. Such a message might be published and hold the positions steady on both sides until we have had time to go into the heart of the matter.

When you have had time to consider this may I have a word with you about it sometime tomorrow. Meanwhile I also enclose for your personal eye copies of two messages from the Prime Minister to the President.

Yours sincerely
Harold Macmillan

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