

20 December 1972

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Potential West European Reaction to SALT Option
of Removal of Nuclear Submarines from [REDACTED]
Holy Loch

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The West European reaction to US closure of the nuclear submarine bases at [REDACTED] and Holy Loch in the context of SALT would, on balance, be negative. There are a number of factors which would determine the intensity of the reactions, including: the manner in which the closure was negotiated; the attitude of the NATO allies to our consultations with them about the move; and the ability of the US to demonstrate that the step would not diminish the credibility of the US deterrent. We see the following negative and mitigating considerations:

Negative Considerations:

1. In the context of the rough nuclear parity with the Soviet Union that the US has accepted and the European perception of an American tendency toward withdrawal worldwide, many of our allies would see the step as another confirmation of the US move toward a more restricted military posture. To the extent that these bases are conceived as part of the "Atlantic" defense--as distinct from their role as part of the central US nuclear capability--this reaction would be aggravated.

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2. The West Europeans would see the step as a specific concession to the long-standing Soviet campaign against US bases in foreign countries. As such, the concession would appear significant politically even if the military viability of the move were proven.

3. To the extent that the bases are part of the linkage between the defense of Europe and the US deterrent, the allies would worry about the effect of the move on this linkage.

4. The move would also be seen, at least by the British, as diminishing allied involvement in control of the deterrent.

Mitigating Considerations:

1. Removal of the bases might be seen by the Europeans as something that could be traded for Soviet dismantling of MRBMs targeted on Western Europe.

2. Those Europeans who in fact favor eliminating Western Europe as a potential nuclear battlefield would see this as a desirable step in that direction.

3. Provided that it can be shown that the US is moving toward a substitute force of longer-range submarines which do not require overseas bases, the Europeans might be persuaded that their security is not adversely affected and that the US is maintaining a technological lead in deploying an even more secure deterrent. (It should be noted that we successfully quieted European fears when we removed obsolescent MRBMs from Italy and Turkey.)

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