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SECRETARY GENERAL'S PRESS STATEMENT

Ministerial Meeting
Brussels, 6th December 1978

It is again my pleasure to welcome you all on the eve of the winter meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers.

You are already aware of the outcome of the Eurogroup and Defence Ministers' meetings, but I would like to add some brief personal observations.

I was greatly encouraged by the action taken by Ministers to move ahead on the AWACS project. After several years of concerted effort we now appear to have the basis for a viable programme, subject to the resolution of one or two remaining issues. And I was also heartened by the initial response to the Long-Term Defence Programme endorsed by NATO Heads of State and Government at their Washington meeting in May. We are clearly moving along the right road, but I would be less than candid if I did not admit that we still have a very long way to go if we are to translate intentions into capabilities.

Looking now at the meeting of the Council, it comes at a particularly significant time, against a background of many important international developments. I would mention first our hopes for the early conclusion of a SALT II agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union. If such an agreement is reached, it will not only constitute a major step in curbing the strategic arms race but will also oblige allied nations to define more clearly their thinking on what the future scope of the SALT negotiating process should be.

Secondly, there is the follow-up to the Camp David accords which all member nations have been following closely. Here, I would like to pay tribute to the immense personal efforts made by President Carter to generate and maintain momentum in the search for peace.

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Thirdly, we have seen in recent months the emergence of a more active foreign policy on the part of the People's Republic of China. The Chinese desire to modernize their economy, and to play a more outward-looking role in world affairs is a factor which Allied Governments must take into account in structuring their future policies.

While I cannot predict the problems which Foreign Ministers will wish to discuss over the next two days - especially in their restricted session - I would imagine that these will be among the issues they will have in mind.

Their formal agenda opens with a general review of the international situation, in which Ministers will no doubt refer to the current state of on-going East/West negotiations, such as the MBFR talks in Vienna. While there has been some movement there since Ministers last met, we are certainly not within sight of the agreement we seek : the difference over Warsaw Pact troop strength in the reduction area, for instance, remains a stumbling-block.

Ministers will likewise take stock of where we stand in the CSCE implementation process, looking toward the next review meeting in 1980 in Madrid.

Also on their agenda, Ministers will have the report which I was invited at the Washington Meeting to prepare on economic assistance and co-operation within the Alliance. My own recent visits to both Turkey and Portugal have served to reinforce my conviction of the absolute necessity for more fortunate allied nations, in whatever way they may feel most appropriate, to come urgently to the aid of these less favoured allies whose short and medium-term economic problems are serious indeed. To these I may add Greece, whose economic situation is, however, not that critical.

Foreign Ministers will in addition receive reports on the work of the Conference of National Armaments Directors; on AWACS; and on the situation in the Mediterranean, as is traditional. They will also have a report before them on the activities of the Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society, which continues to be most effective in carrying out pilot studies in many areas affecting the everyday lives of our citizens, and notably on energy - its rational use, conservation, alternative sources, and future automotive propulsion systems.

So much for my introductory remarks. I will now try to answer your questions, before inviting you to join me at the press reception.