

PRIME MINISTER

James Reston: New York Times

You have agreed to see James ("Scotty") Reston, senior columnist of the New York Times, for 45 minutes on an unattributable basis at 1700 tomorrow. I will bring him up to the study.

Scotty Reston is a very influential American journalist and doyen of the Washington columnists. His articles are syndicated in the Washington Post, the International Herald Tribune and more than 80 other leading newspapers throughout the United States.

Scotty Reston has been in Paris earlier this week where he has interviewed President Mitterrand.

Reston would like a broad tour d'horizon with you to cover some of the subjects which he has been discussing with President Mitterrand, namely:

- the Alliance;
- East/West relations;
- defence, including the nuclear deterrent and the stationing of American missiles in Europe.

Niko Henderson reports that the American media is giving an unusually heavy focus to French and German attitudes at the moment so your interview with Reston gives an opportunity to put the British point of view on major questions.

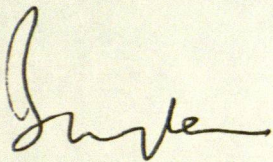
Although Reston has not asked to talk to you about Northern Ireland, this would also be a good opportunity to steer the discussion in that direction to make clear your views in the hope that they will be widely reported in the many papers in which Reston's column is syndicated.

Briefing

Short briefing notes on the following subjects are attached:

- the new French administration, since Reston has just been to France (Flag A);

- Defence matters (Flag B);
- Northern Ireland (Flag C).

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'B. Ingham', written in dark ink.

B. INGHAM

2 June 1981

INTERVIEW WITH THE PRIME MINISTER BY MR JAMES RESTON

NEW FRENCH ADMINISTRATION

POINTS TO MAKE

UK Relationship with New French Government

1. Look forward to meeting President Mitterrand (at European Council). Encouraging exchange of messages with him and expect to continue tradition of close Anglo-French collaboration. Lord Carrington already had fruitful exchange with M Cheysson (on 28 May in Paris).

Effect of Socialist Victory on Alliance

2. No reason to expect any change in French policy. President Mitterrand's declared policies very firm on this point.

Communist Participation in Government

3. Not for me to speculate on who might or might not be included in a French Government. But have every confidence in M. Mitterrand's ability to construct, with his Prime Minister, a government that satisfies France's foreign as well as domestic political requirements.

Franco/German Relationship

4. Close friendship between our own friends must be in our interests. Wrong to see the Franco/German relationship as an exclusive axis automatically harmful to UK, EC or Alliance interests.

MR JAMES RESTON'S INTERVIEW WITH THE PRIME MINISTER

Defence Matters

Points to make

1. Government attaches utmost importance to Alliance cohesion. Welcome as major contribution to this end willingness of new US Administration to consult Allies fully on all major issues.
2. Vital in this context that TNF double decision of December 1979 be fully implemented. UK taking more cruise missiles than any other country: work at Greenham Common (96 cruise missiles will be deployed starting in late 1983) going well. HMG also deeply committed to TNF arms control negotiations which are condition for European support for modernisation, and welcomes similar commitment of US Administration.
3. UK resolved to continue to make full contribution to Alliance defence. Defence review not therefore predicated on need to cut UK's defence budget. On the contrary, commitment to NATO 3% real growth target remains.
4. But changes in nature of threat require us to rethink response. And cost of defence equipment soaring. So even increasing levels of defence expenditure mean that new and soundly-designed defence programme needed to maximise UK's defence capability. Objectives are to avoid short term economies which reduce effectiveness and provide instead sound basis for UK to carry out its NATO defence tasks in 1990s and beyond.
5. All options being considered but no decisions yet taken. No question of Royal Navy being reduced to coastal defence force. Reorganisation of BAOR being considered, but full account being taken of Brussels Treaty commitments.

Defence Department  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
2 June 1981

PRIME MINISTER'S NEW YORK TIMES INTERVIEW

International Aspects of Northern Ireland

POINTS TO MAKE

1. We want to build on our already good relations with the Republic of Ireland to the benefit of all the people of both countries. We recognise, of course, that our neighbours in the Republic are concerned about the situation in the North. We both have much to gain from working more closely together. Above all we have an overriding and shared interest in peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

2. We are not discussing the constitutional status of Northern Ireland with the Republic. Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom because the majority of the people there wish to remain in the United Kingdom. We cannot throw them out against their wishes. But we have said that if they wish to cease to remain in the United Kingdom, then their wishes will be respected. This principle of consent is fully accepted by the Government of the Republic.

PRIME MINISTER'S NEW YORK TIMES INTERVIEW

International Aspects of Northern Ireland

BACKGROUND

1. The New York Times' treatment of the hunger strike and attendant events in Northern Ireland has overall been good. But editorial comment has urged the Prime Minister to take a bold step. Feature articles have tended to portray the joint studies as offering a new and promising overall approach to the Northern Ireland problem, and have over simplified the case of the British Government expressing an interest in a united Ireland and discussing the constitutional status of Northern Ireland with the Government of the Republic. These misconceptions need to be put right, but with some caution as HMG's readiness to engage in discussions with the Irish Government has done much to encourage Irish-American politicians to adopt a moderate approach.

/ 2. Two recent examples from the New York Times are attached.