Ref: A01692

CONFIDENTIAL

MR. WHITMORE

[handwritten: Prime Minister]
[handwritten: Will consider with Lord C. Alpha A ?]
[handwritten: out]
[handwritten: Rwb]

<u>Suez Records</u>

  Under the 30 Year Rule the official papers relating to the Suez affair will be due for release to the Public Record Office in <u>1986</u>.

2. There are, as you will imagine, a very large number of them in the Whitehall archives, and many of them are still very sensitive. Before 1986 they will have to be reviewed, and decisions will have to be taken about which papers can and cannot be released to the Public Record Office at that date. The review will take some time, and the Ministry of Defence - the Department principally concerned - will want to put the review in hand soon, so as to make sure that release is not delayed when the time comes in 1986.

3. The Ministry of Defence papers on Suez have, since 1963, been kept under a special embargo within the Ministry which has prevented them from being available for study or reference. This embargo was imposed by the then Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Macmillan, following an attempt by the then Chief of the Defence Staff, Lord Mountbatten of Burma, to have them made available for a study of the Suez campaign by the Joint Services Staff College. This embargo will need to be lifted, if the review of the papers with a view to release to the PRO is to be started; and, as the embargo was imposed by a Prime Minister, it can be lifted only by his successor.

4. When the embargo was imposed, the events of Suez were only 7 years away, and many of those directly concerned were still active in public life. It is now over 20 years since the Suez affair: almost all of those directly concerned at senior level are out of public life, and many are no longer living. It seems to me to be not unreasonable to lift the Macmillan embargo to the extent required to enable the Ministry of Defence to review the papers and to decide which can be released in 1986 and which must be held for a longer period. I think, however, the papers should not be made available for other purposes of study or reference before 1986.

[handwritten margin: Who decides? A.]

5. I should be grateful for the Prime Minister's authority to lift the embargo to that extent.

[signature: RSA]

<u>14th March 1980</u>   (Robert Armstrong)