



MO 22/5

PRIME MINISTER

After Mr. Pym's proposed

come to other special news.

Prime Minister.

Mr Pym proposes not to release to the Select Committee on Defence the papers that were leaked to PA. I think this is right; so does Bernard Ingham. But earlier you took the opposite view because not to release them could make us look silly (see attached papers).

What would you like Mr Pym to do?

HOUSE OF COMMONS DEFENCE COMMITTEE:
REQUEST FOR LEAKED DOCUMENTS

*HW
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As you know, I have been considering how I should respond to the request put by the House of Commons Defence Committee - which the Committee has made public - to provide it with copies of all the documents relating to future levels of defence expenditure which were earlier improperly disclosed to the Press Association.

2. I am persuaded that, although these documents are now to some extent in the public domain and it is awkward to refuse their transmission to a House Committee, it would be wrong - largely on the grounds of setting an unfortunate precedent - to release them since it would jeopardise two essential principles relating to:

- a. the confidentiality of advice given by officials to Ministers, and
- b. the confidentiality of the process of consultation between Ministers, and between Departments on their behalf, and the level and manner in which decisions are taken.

We laid particular emphasis on these principles in the Government's reply to the First Special Report from the Education, Science and Arts Committee (Command 7982, presented on 24th July). They are perhaps particularly relevant in this instance now that the Cabinet has taken and made public its decisions on the matters which were under discussion in the leaked documents.

3. I therefore propose, subject to your views, to decline the Committee's request but, in doing so, to offer a memorandum on defence expenditure, responding in particular to any particular questions the Committee may wish to ask.

4. I would like a reply to go to the Committee, if possible, by the end of this week.

CONFIDENTIAL

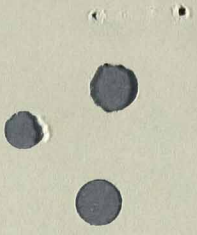


5. I am sending copies of this minute to the Lord President, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Chief Secretary, and the Chief Whip; to the Attorney General in view of the investigation the Police are now making into the leak; and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

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Ministry of Defence

26th November 1980



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