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Defence, May 1979 (Briefing on Warsaw Pact). 15

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

7 June 1979

B/F 21-6-79
Answered on Part 2

Intelligence Briefing: C.T.B. and Chemical Warfare

As you know, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Lord Privy Seal attended the first part of the intelligence briefing arranged for the Prime Minister by the Ministry of Defence (Roger Facer's letter of 5 June to me, copied to you) at No. 10 on 6 June at 1500. As the briefing started late, however, they were obliged to leave halfway through and consequently missed the concluding discussion.

During the course of that discussion, following Sir John Aiken's illustrated account of those sectors of the Soviet Union's military capability in which the Russians are believed to have achieved parity with or superiority over N.A.T.O., the Prime Minister recalled her concern over certain aspects of the C.T.B. negotiations. You will remember (my letter of 23 May to George Walden) that the Prime Minister voiced these concerns, centering in particular around the possibility that the Soviet Union could decouple underground nuclear explosions and that a C.T.B. treaty could inhibit essential stockpile testing, to Mr. Cyrus Vance when they discussed nuclear and strategic matters at No. 10 on 23 May. Mr. Vance commented that the Prime Minister's anxieties were not shared by the U.S. scientific community and offered to put U.S. scientific experts in touch with their U.K. counterparts in order to discuss the matter. I should be grateful if you would let me know whether there is any sign of this offer bearing fruit; the Prime Minister will wish to see the summary of the whole spectrum of expert opinion on this issue before making a final judgement.

There was also some reference in the discussion following Sir John Aiken's briefing to Soviet preparations for chemical warfare. The Prime Minister's attention was drawn to the fact that the U.K. had put forward, in 1976 in Geneva, a draft convention on the banning of chemical weapons. The Prime Minister asked for more information about this: I should be grateful if a note could be prepared on the progress of the U.K. proposal. The note should cover, in particular, the question of whether the West might lose rather than gain from a convention on chemical weapons which the Soviet Union might violate without detection.

I am sending copies of this letter to Roger Facer (MOD) and Martin Vile (Cabinet Office).

B. G. CARTLEDGE

Paul Lever, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office. SECRET

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