

CONFIDENTIAL

PRIME MINISTER

The attached letter from Mr David Steel asks you to repeat the classified defence briefing which you, as Leader of the Opposition, and he had in 1976.

His request raises difficulties which did not exist at the time of the last briefing. Mr Foot is now the Leader of the Opposition. Do you want him to have a classified defence briefing? If he was invited to such an occasion, would he accept? If he did not, would it be worth giving just Mr Steel a briefing?

And what about the SDP? Presumably they would have to be treated in the same way as the Liberals. No

If you do decide that there should be a briefing, it plainly should not take place until after the conclusion of the defence review and the announcement of the Government's decisions. This points to a briefing in the autumn.

Because of these snags, which raise issues of delicate political judgment, I have not sent Mr Steel's letter to Mr Nott's office for his advice. But you may like to have a word with him about it after your meeting with him and the First Sea Lord on Monday morning. You may also like to mention it to the Home Secretary and the Chief Whip when they are here at 10.45 on Monday.

→ *Steel*

JW

5 June 1981

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