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Mr Prime Minister
You asked to

THE NINE O'CLOCK NEWS : BBC TV 1 : 2100 : 19.12.85 :

JOHN HUMPHRYS:

The row over the future of Westland helicopters went to the Cabinet today and it ended with a snub for the Defence Secretary, Michael Heseltine. Tonight our correspondent says his political future is in the balance.

Mr Heseltine had been arguing for a European rescue deal to save the company rather than an American one, but Mrs Thatcher made it clear the Government won't be intervening. The company's shareholders alone will choose.

Today the deal with the Americans was being strongly backed by Westland's Chairman.

SIR JOHN CUCKNEY:

In the case of the United Technologies Fiat deal, we are guaranteed work of the type we want, irrespective entirely of market developments, not dependent on the sale of some particular product or product range or on the decision of some Government. So we have a much more secure workload.

NOEL LEWIS:

Michael Heseltine's political future is in the balance tonight; he's been given a final warning by the Prime Minister: stop arguing against the Government's decision that Westland should be allowed to make its own choice of partners. Mrs Thatcher took the trouble to get the approval of the full Cabinet for her line today. Mr Heseltine had his say, arguing that it isn't a good deal for Britain, but the Cabinet's collective decision against him was confirmed. Some Ministers are hoping that the Defence Secretary continues to defy his colleagues; it's accepted now that they and Mrs Thatcher would like to get rid of him. One graphic explanation today was that he's hanging on the end of a branch with most of his Cabinet colleagues hoping he falls off. But the Prime Minister doesn't want to sack him, with all the trouble that would cause, and Mr Heseltine, independently wealthy, is only interested in being a

see this. It's pretty inoffensive, though a technical breach of the cease-fire.

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Cabinet Minister. Leon Brittan, his main rival, had no doubt about the Cabinet's decision.

RT HON LEON BRITTAN:

I am talking about what the position of the Government is, and I have said what it is. It is what I said on Monday; it is what the Prime Minister said on Tuesday; it is what the Cabinet reaffirmed this morning; it is what the Prime Minister restated this afternoon, and it is that it is for the company to make its mind up and not to be fettered or to have a pistol pointed at its head by anybody.

N.L.:

In the Commons the Labour Leader, Neil Kinnock, argued that the Government should be backing a European rescue. Later he accepted that Mr Heseltine was in trouble.

INTERVIEWER:

...Mr Heseltine's in trouble?

NEIL KINNOCK:

I think he must be; he's made his view so obvious, invested so much credibility, very publicly in the course of this week, in following what's called the European option; that to be rebuffed or delayed or inhibited in any way is bound to put his future position in jeopardy. If he allows himself to be over-ruled in this fashion and set aside, then he is going to have to turn his coat for the rest of his political career, so far as I can see.

N.L.:

Mr Heseltine now faces a difficult decision: accept the Sikorsky Fiat option, as ordered by the Cabinet, or carry on fighting for the European consortium and risk the wrath of Mrs Thatcher.
