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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

24 November 1980

(25)

Dear George,

Prime Minister's Visit to Italy

As you know, the Prime Minister discussed with the Prime Minister of Italy, Signor Forlani, yesterday evening the question of Italian attendance at Summit Meetings.

The Prime Minister raised the question herself. She told Signor Forlani that there was at present no proposal to hold a quadripartite summit and that therefore the question of Italian participation was not an actual one. She added that she fully understood the position of the Italian Government and the difficulties which flowed from the previous Italian Government's decision to accept Cruise missiles on Italian soil.

Signor Forlani, according to the Prime Minister, spoke very forcefully and at length along the expected lines. The Cruise missile decision had been taken against the wishes of the majority of opinion in Italy - though the majority against deployment had probably not been very great. Signor Cossiga's Government had been conscious of the need to support NATO. However if there was a quadripartite summit and Italy was excluded, there was a real possibility that the question would be re-opened. Given that majority opinion was against the deployment, the outcome of a reconsideration of the issue was unpredictable. Signor Forlani had ended by expressing gratitude for the Prime Minister's comprehension of the Italian Government's difficulty.

As you know, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary suggested that the Prime Minister should discuss the matter with Chancellor Schmidt next week. The position of the Italian Government is of course of particular importance to the Federal Republic since Italy is a non-nuclear power and her position is closer to that of the Federal Republic than is our own.

I am sending a copy of this letter to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever

Michael Alexander

George Walden, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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