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PRIME MINISTER

I mentioned to you yesterday the message which I had just received from the new National Security Adviser at the White House, Mr Robert C McFarlane, expressing their "profound disappointment" at the British Government's public reaction to their effort to restore democracy and order to Grenada.

2. Quite apart from the contents of the message, it was a surprise to me to receive any message from the National Security Adviser. As you know, there has in times past been a close relationship between the National Security Adviser and the Secretary of the Cabinet, and not merely on the subject of Anglo-American nuclear understandings which are discussed between the White House on the one hand and 10 Downing Street and the Cabinet Office on the other. Sir Burke Trend had a close relationship with Dr Kissinger when he was National Security Adviser; and both Sir John Hunt and I had a similar relationship with ^{Mr.} Brzezinski, who was President Carter's National Security Adviser. But this relationship ceased when President Reagan took office: for reasons (I suspect) largely of internal politics, neither Mr Allen nor Judge Clark ever sought to establish such a relationship. When I negotiated the renewal of the Anglo-American nuclear understandings in February 1981, it was with Mr McFarlane that I dealt; and it was with Mr McFarlane that Mr Goodall dealt when an extension to them was in question.

3. Mr McFarlane's message therefore suggests that he may be willing to contemplate a reopening of the old relationship between the National Security Adviser and the Secretary of the Cabinet. There are of course complications about such a relationship, in particular in setting up a direct relationship which bypasses the diplomatic channel. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office have always been understandably sensitive about this aspect of it. On the other hand it has always been felt that, given the nature of the system in Washington and the distance that seems sometimes to divide the White House and the

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State Department, it is in our interests to develop the direct relationship with the White House in parallel with the normal relationships through diplomatic channels; and we have on the whole successfully avoided the potential disadvantages at this end by a policy of candour which ensures that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office do not have reason to complain that we are doing things behind their backs.

4. I am inclined to think that, if Mr McFarlane is now ready to resume at any rate something of the direct relationship which his predecessors have had with successive Secretaries of the Cabinet, it is still in our interests to respond to and encourage that; and it is with that consideration in mind that I have considered what sort of reply might be sent to the message.

5. The draft reply which I attach is intended to make, in a friendly but nonetheless unmistakable way, six main points:

- (1) The reaction of which he complains was in some considerable degree attributable to the inadequacy of the consultation, both in terms of the timing and the amount of information and background provided.
- (2) You and the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary were put in a very difficult political situation here, because of the need to respond immediately to Parliamentary pressures. You could hardly dissemble the comparative lack of consultation. Nonetheless you did, at some political cost, seek to avoid public condemnation in the House of Commons of what the Americans had done.
- (3) One really cannot compare the Falklands and Grenada.
- (4) What matters now is to get on with restoring peace and democracy in Grenada. We should be ready to consider doing whatever we could to help.
- (5) The British Government was not responsible for the recent press stories about your meeting with Mr Dam.
- (6) If he wants to revive the direct relationship with me, I am willing to play.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

9 November 1983

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MR ROBERT C MCFARLANE
THE WHITE HOUSE

Thank you very much for your message of 7 November.

I had been intending to write to you, to congratulate you on your appointment as National Security Adviser, to wish you well in your important role, and to express the hope that you would continue to be my point of contact on the particular Anglo-American matters which we first discussed together in February 1981.

I am glad that you have written as frankly as you have done, and I welcome the opportunity to respond, with I hope no less frankness and in the same spirit of friendship. I certainly do not want - nobody here wants - to prolong our differences. But let me comment on one or two points.

We have enough experience of the complexities of planning and the difficulties of decision-making for operations of this kind to understand the considerations that inhibited your consultations with us before the rescue mission went into Grenada. There are a thousand and one things to think of and to do; and it is important to maintain a high degree of security. And of course you had also to deal with the consequences of that horrible tragedy in Beirut. We were grateful for the advance notice that you were able to give us. The problems arose partly, I think, because we did not appreciate quite how soon you were thinking of acting; we put our thoughts together as quickly as we could after receiving the President's message, but were (I must admit) dismayed to learn before we had sent the reply that it was in effect too late to affect the decision: the action was already launched. Perhaps it is also fair to say that our views at that stage were inevitably based on incomplete knowledge of the situation to which you were responding. Our replies to the President's message might have differed at any rate in nuance or degree if there had been more time and more knowledge.

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So too might the public position. On that, however, I have to say that Ministers were at great pains to avoid as far as possible criticism or condemnation of the President's decision, in what was for them a very difficult domestic political situation. Because of the exigencies of Parliamentary procedures the Foreign Secretary could not avoid having to make a statement in the House of Commons on the Monday afternoon when we were still in ignorance of your intentions, and a speech the following afternoon, by which time your action had taken place. The apparent inability of the British Government to predict or influence the course of events was thus thrown into the sharpest possible focus. But in a Parliamentary situation when the Opposition and some of the Government's own backbenchers were not slow to voice criticisms, Sir Geoffrey Howe, and the Prime Minister in answering questions, were careful not to criticise or condemn; and Sir Geoffrey at least paid a considerable political price for appearing to be "indecisive". And of course the timing was all wrong in relation to the controversy about cruise missile deployment. I am sure that your people here will have told you how ready the Government's critics were to exploit the charges of lack of consultation and of American failure to take account of British views in the Grenada context, just at a moment when cruise missiles were about to arrive here and the question of the "adequacy" of the arrangements for joint consultation on the use of United States nuclear weapons in the United Kingdom was being revived as an active political issue. The Government have dealt with this robustly, and have secured a resounding Parliamentary majority in favour of the existing arrangements. But the controversy was given new impetus, and we have not heard the last of it.

As to your reference to the Falklands, I could weary you with much cogent argument about the difference between what we were doing there and what you were doing in Grenada, and about the differing extent to which we needed one another's support in each case. But I will spare you that, because (like you) I don't want to prolong our differences. I think that there is much greater recognition here now than at the outset of the conditions

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in Grenada which called for action on your part. We fully support the objectives of restoring democracy on the island and enabling its people to live in peace and safety. As you say, the Governor-General and the regional states will be taking the lead. We shall certainly be ready to consider seriously and sympathetically any proposals that we might help, whether individually or in some Commonwealth-related effort, consistently with our other commitments and with the sensitivities that inevitably attach to the ex-colonial power.

The Prime Minister was glad to see Kenneth Dam the other day. You may have read or heard of subsequent press stories here; as the Prime Minister said in the House of Commons, she did not recognise them as relating to the meeting she attended, and they were certainly not the result of any briefing from us.

Thank you again for writing, and for writing so frankly. As you say, it helps to clear the air. You may be sure that we want as much as you do to put these differences behind us and to set Anglo-American relations, and particularly the relationship between your President and my Prime Minister, back on to the footing that they ought to be on. Your predecessors and mine have enjoyed a close and friendly relationship, and the ability to communicate privately and directly with one another, to the mutual benefit of their principals in times past. The fact that you and I already know one another and have done business together should enable us to do likewise, if you think that that would be helpful. At any rate you know that this channel is open to you whenever you are disposed to use it.

I look forward to meeting you again before long.

With best wishes

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