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BF 23/1/85 ~~CEP~~

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B/f for mtg of R(A)  
24/1/85

PRIME MINISTER

FUTURE BRITISH SPACE PROGRAMME

On 11 December, Geoffrey Pattie gave a presentation to you and those colleagues most immediately concerned on the issues to be decided at the Ministerial meeting of the European Space Agency at the end of January, including the possible UK involvement in the European response to President Reagan's invitation to participate in the international space station project. In the discussion which followed, there was general agreement that we should not rule ourselves out of this high technology space station project at such an early stage, and that the UK should participate in Phase B feasibility stage of the proposed ESA programme. The costs, estimated at £7 million over two years, would be borne by the DTI within its existing budget.

2 I had already made clear that the cost of Phases C and D, some £30 million a year for eight years, could not be met within my Department's existing budget and Cabinet Office officials were asked to consider how, in these circumstances, contributions to Phases C and D would be funded if the UK took part. They were also invited to consider the position on the UK's contribution to the ESA science programme and the proposal for an inter-departmental space directorate at Farnborough: their recommendations on these three issues are contained in E(A)(85)3 to be discussed on 24 January.





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3 By way of background for those colleagues who were not at the 11 December presentation, I attach a note which gives a short account of present space programmes and policy; describes and assesses the main elements of the proposed ESA Long-Term Programme; outlines the US space station plans and our European partners' reactions; and identifies the main options open to us (Annex A).

4 In agreeing that the UK should enter Phase B of the ESA space station programme, colleagues emphasised the need to establish firm criteria in advance, against which we shall assess the success of Phase B at the time we decide whether to participate in subsequent phases. A list of proposed criteria is given in Annex B. It will be important to make these criteria known to our European and American partners at the time we commit ourselves to Phase B.

5 On the question of the need for a Space Directorate, I agree the time is now ripe to establish such an organisation. It should improve the cost effectiveness of our space programmes, the way in which we administer them and the way we determine policy priorities. ESA Treaty obligations would make it essential for the Directorate to report to a civil department and I am content that this should be DTI, though the management Board should be shared by those Departments and other organisations (including industry) subscribing to the expenditure.





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6 I am copying this minute to members of E(A), to Michael Heseltine and Keith Joseph, to Sir Robin Nicholson and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

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2 | January 1985

Department of Trade & Industry