



Prime Minister

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Ref. A085/2968

MR POWELL

Agree to RTA's
proposed reply?

CDP
19/xi

Yes no

I attach a copy of a message I have received from Mr Robert McFarlane about briefings on the Soviet SDI.

2. You will see that he proposes (unless the Prime Minister believes it inappropriate) to offer classified briefing to the new editor of The Times, to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and to Dr David Owen. He asks if we think it might be useful to make the briefing available to others.

3. As to The Times, I am inclined to suggest that the briefing should go to the defence correspondent as well as the editor; my impression is that the new editor will be less of a "leader writer" than his predecessor.

4. It might also be useful if the briefing were to be extended to the editor and defence correspondent of the Daily Telegraph.

5. I suggest that it might also be useful if the briefing were to be extended to Professor Michael Howard.

6. Subject to the Prime Minister's views, I would propose to reply to Mr McFarlane's message on the lines of the draft attached.

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

19 November 1985

CABINET OFFICE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L VIA CABINET OFFICE CHANNELS WHO1541

FOR SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG FROM ROBERT C. MCFARLANE

SUBJECT: CLASSIFIED BRIEFINGS ON SOVIET SDI

DEAR ROBERT

1. WE HAVE PUT TOGETHER A CLASSIFIED BRIEFING WHICH IS BEING SHOWN ON A BACKGROUND BASIS TO SELECTED EUROPEAN LEADERS AND OPINIONS MOLDERS. WE HAVE BRIEFED AN EDITOR OF THE SUNDAY TIMES WHO WAS HERE IN WASHINGTON RECENTLY AND WE PLAN TO HAVE THE BRIEFING TEAM TRAVEL TO LONDON AFTER THE GENEVA SUMMIT IN ORDER TO BRIEF THE NEW EDITOR OF THE TIMES OF LONDON. UNLESS THE PRIME MINISTER BELIEVES IT INAPPROPRIATE WE PROPOSE TO OFFER THE BRIEFING TO NORMAN TEBBIT AND WOULD ALSO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITY TO BRIEF DAVID OWEN.

2. THE PURPOSE OF THE BRIEFING, WHICH INCLUDES SOME INTELLIGENCE MATERIAL WHICH DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE WILLIAM CASEY HAS APPROVED FOR BACKGROUNDING, IS TO SHOW THE EXTENT OF THE SOVIET STRATEGIC DEFENSE BUILDUP AND THE RESOURCES THE SOVIETS ARE PUTTING INTO THIS AREA. IT EXPLAINS WHY WE ARE ADVOCATING A WESTERN RESEARCH PROGRAM. IF YOU THINK IT MIGHT PROVE USEFUL, WE WOULD BE PREPARED TO MAKE THE BRIEFING AVAILABLE TO OTHERS YOU AND THE PRIME MINISTER MAY SUGGEST.

WARM REGARDS
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