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Sir Robert Armstrong GCB CVO  
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*Prime Minister*<sup>2</sup>

*RTA and Chief Whip will  
submit advice tomorrow. I am  
very read concluded they should  
be given both documents and  
taken at their word at X  
over.*

*Dear Robert,*

MEETING WITH SIR HUMPHREY ATKINS AND DR GILBERT

*N.L.W.  
10.2*

Together with Mr Macdonald and Mr O'Shea, I met Sir Humphrey Atkins and Dr Gilbert this evening to discuss how much additional information they should be able to put to the Select Committee on Defence in relation to Mr Brittan's minute of 4 October and Mr Hosker's letter of 18 October about Westland PLC.

We will circulate a full note of the discussion. The outcome was that Sir Humphrey and Dr Gilbert identified those parts of the two documents they wished to be able to show to the Defence Committee, namely:

4 October minute: paragraphs 2-17 and 19. They recognised the commercial sensitivity of the passage in brackets in paragraph 13 and asked me to ask Westland if they objected to the Committee's being shown it on a confidential basis. If Westland did so object, they would not insist.

18 October letter: the first sentence of paragraph 2; paragraph 3, with the exception of the last two sentences; paragraphs 4 and 5.

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Sir Humphrey argued that making this selection available would not breach the principle that the Government did not hand over such documents to Select Committees. I enquired about the basis on which they would show these extracts, if we agreed to hand them over, to the Committee. Sir Humphrey said that once documents were in the hands of a Select Committee it was for the Committee to decide whether or not to publish them. This was the constitutional position and he could not abrogate it. He could not therefore agree that a decision to publish should be subject to Ministerial veto. As was usual in such cases, however, the Committee would consult with the Government on what should be published: in his experience and that of Dr Gilbert, the Select Committee on Defence had never published anything which, after discussion and argument, Ministers had not accepted, however reluctantly, should be published.

I said that regretfully I could not release the extracts on that basis, which did not accord with what I had understood to be the basis agreed. I had supposed that Ministers, not the Committee, would have the right to decide what should or should not be published from any extracts handed over to Sir Humphrey and Dr Gilbert. I said I would consult further and we parted amicably, with my promising to let Sir Humphrey know as soon as possible whether Ministers were prepared to authorise me to hand over the extracts which he and Dr Gilbert had identified, on the basis he had proposed. Meanwhile they have taken none of this material.

We now need a Ministerial decision on this point. As you know my own feeling is that we should do what Sir Humphrey and Dr Gilbert have requested, and I shall so advise my Secretary of State. I recognise, however, that other Ministers, and the Government collectively, have an interest in the principle at stake .

I am sending copies of this letter to Clive Whitmore, Antony Acland, Nigel Wicks, David Morris and Murdo Maclean.

*Yours ever*  
*Brian*

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PS:

Following our conversation I have told Sir Humphrey that we cannot give him a reply until Ministers have been consulted. He told me that the Committee would meet tomorrow morning for a deliberative session, without witnesses. They would be considering whether they needed additional evidence. In any statement to the Press they would say, in relation to the two documents, that their request to have them remained on the table. He would be grateful if I could give him a substantive reply by Thursday of this week. I said we would do our best. He added that if you wished to speak to him about the Committee's position he was at your service.

BA.

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