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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

25 November 1986

Dear Charles,

SALT Limits

We understand that President Reagan is now likely to take a decision on 25 or 26 November on whether to breach the SALT limits. The Government's view - that both sides should continue to observe the agreements - has been set out firmly in recent days, notably by the Prime Minister to Ambassador Price and by the Foreign Secretary to Mr Nitze. In addition, in the House of Commons on 18 November the Prime Minister underlined this view in public. In the light of these statements, and of her wish not to raise the subject with President Reagan, the Foreign Secretary has considered that a further message from her to the President at this last minute would not be desirable.

However, as soon as the President's decision is known - and at this stage the odds must be on a decision to breach the limits - the Government's views will again be sought both in this country and abroad. We understand that an announcement as such is unlikely and that the result in the form of the 131st ALCM-equipped bomber being deployed may not be apparent until December. However, a leak of the decision cannot be excluded, to be followed by a White House statement.

We shall wish to study the terms of any announcement with care, and to exploit any positive elements in it. For the immediate future the Foreign Secretary suggests that we should therefore deploy only the following line:

- that the Government has repeatedly made clear its view that the SALT agreements should continue to be observed by both sides;
- we have recognised the US concerns about Soviet non-compliance and we have the Soviet authorities on many occasions to respond to these concerns. We regret the lack of substantive Soviet response;
- we look forward to further consultations with the US Administration on these and related issues;

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- our priority remains the conclusion of a significant new agreement on strategic arms, based on adequate verification to ensure compliance, as identified between the Prime Minister and President Reagan at Camp David. That would transcend the debate about past agreements in this area.

Yours ever,

Colin Budd

(C R Budd)
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq
PS/10 Downing Street

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