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From the Secretary of the Cabinet and Head of the Home Civil Service

Sir Robert Armstrong GCB CVO

Ref. A087/1550

3 June 1987

*Dear Robert,*Venice Economic Summit: Possible East-West Declaration

I have seen your letter of 1 June to Charles Powell, and his reply of 2 June. *at last*

I found in Rome yesterday that the Italian Government had been given a private copy of the revised United States draft, when Signor Fanfani was in Washington last week. They knew that we were going to be asked to circulate it; I said that I thought it very unlikely that we would, given our preference for no declaration on this subject. They were pretty unhappy about the implications for the Venice Summit. The US draft would be unacceptable, they believe, to some other countries and particularly to the French. The production of an alternative draft at this late stage, when a draft had already, with some difficulty, been agreed, would irritate some of the Summit countries concerned (it had clearly irritated them). They were fearful that, if this revised draft was produced, it would lead to the kind of wrangle which occurred in similar circumstances at Williamsburg in 1983, with a row prolonged into the Heads of State or Government session on the morning of 9 June which would inevitably become publicly known - because one or other delegation would make sure it did. The result would be widespread and damaging press reports of a Summit split on East-West relations, which would overshadow the good efforts of a robust declaration on terrorism and a positive economic declaration. The Italian Government were clearly apprehensive about the implications of this for the Italian election - and expected that the British Government would have similar apprehensions.

/I agree

Robert Culshaw Esq MVO

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I agree that the US draft is in many ways preferable, so far as we are concerned, to that produced by Political Directors and Personal Representatives. But, having sat through some of the discussions of it, I believe that the Italians are right to fear that the production by the United States at this late stage of an alternative draft, after the United States representatives had agreed the original draft, as well as the tone of the draft itself, would provoke great irritation among some of the Summit participants and that the resulting row could wreck attempts to present a united front and a successful gathering at the Summit.

If that analysis is right, it is for question whether we should draw these considerations to the attention of the United States administration, and encourage them to join us in supporting the idea of no East-West declaration at this Summit, or at least to settle for the draft we have, even if it is not as satisfactory as they would like, rather than risk what would inevitably be a public row.

I am sending copies of this letter to Charles Powell and John Howe.

Yours sincerely

Robert Armstrong

*A possible draft message follows
is attached.*

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Draft of 3 June

DRAFT MESSAGE FROM THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH
SECRETARY TO SECRETARY OF STATE (or Armstrong to
Carlucci)

State Department officials have shown our Embassy in Washington a revised draft of the possible East-West declaration for the Venice Summit which I understand you would like us to sponsor.

I am afraid that it would be difficult for us to do this with credibility. Our position on this has been - and indeed still is - that, though of course the subject will be discussed by Heads of State or Government at Venice, we are not convinced that it is necessary or sensible to issue a declaration on it. A text of a possible declaration was agreed by Political Directors and Personal Representatives at their last meeting, and we could live with that, as no doubt others could, if it was felt that there had to be some declaration. But we have no special enthusiasm for it.

Objectively speaking, your new revised draft is in many respects a better and stronger text.

But I have to say that I foresee great trouble if it is now introduced into the discussion. The text seems very likely to be unacceptable as it stands to some of our partners, and especially to the French; and its introduction at this late stage, after everybody thought that a text had been agreed, will cause dismay and irritation. I am afraid that we have all the ingredients for a repeat of what happened at Williamsburg, when disagreement about a late-produced US text on INF generated an argument which became known to the press and which overshadowed the rest of the Summit.

A Summit dominated by a semi-public wrangle over East-West relations would destroy any impression of unity among the partners, overshadow other elements of the Summit (including the declaration on terrorism), and prevent us from being able credibly to claim a successful Summit. That would no doubt be unwelcome to the Italian presidency just before their elections; and I have to say that it would be pretty unhelpful to us before ours.

So I very much hope that you will join us in

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preferring no declaration, or at least in settling
for the existing text (maybe with one or two
amendments to be discussed at Venice) if it is felt
that there has to be a declaration.

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