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From the Private Secretary

7 October 1983

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The Prime Minister chaired an ad hoc Ministerial meeting at 4.30 today to consider President Reagan's message of 6 October in which, having referred to the approach from the German Government urging that we delay the arrival of Cruise missiles in the United Kingdom, the President expresses the hope that we will inform the German Government that equipment deliveries to the UK must adhere to the existing schedule, which envisages initial deliveries on 1 November.

The meeting was attended by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Secretary of State for Defence, Sir Robert Armstrong, Mr. Goodall, Mr. Blelloch and Mr. Wright. In addition to the President's message your letter of 7 October and Roger Bone's letter of the same date were before the meeting.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that in his view any postponement of the deployment programme to meet German wishes would be very damaging in the light of President Reagan's message. It was not clear yet how far German vacillation might be carried. Herr Genscher had rung him today and explained that when he met Mr. Gromyko shortly he would say to the latter that if the Soviet Union intended to make a proposal which might lead to deployment being deferred, that proposal should come forward quickly. Thus there was at least some prospect of further delay on the part of the Germans.

The Defence Secretary said that his aim had always been to arrange that the equipment should arrive in Britain with the minimum of political difficulty. In various conversations with Mr. Weinberger he had taken the line that we should make such adjustments as were necessary to take account of politically sensitive factors. As a consequence the programme had been adjusted several times. The deployment of major equipment had been postponed from last May until November. More recently, it had appeared that the Germans may not have realised the political significance of the deployment of Cruise missiles in Britain for the debate now scheduled in the Bundestag for 21 November. He had discussed this matter with Mr. Weinberger and suggested that he should put the point to the Germans. Mr. Weinberger had raised no objection. He had therefore

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talked to Dr. Woerner who had said that he would consider the point and let us know the German reactions. Subsequently, Dr. Woerner had conveyed a message to the Defence Secretary, apparently endorsed by Chancellor Kohl, asking that our two Governments should work together to minimise German difficulties. It was somewhat awkward that the US Government had now urged that there should be no delay in our deployment schedule.

Equipment had been arriving here over many months. But we were now reaching the most sensitive and most photogenic equipment. He believed that we should stick to the timetable except in respect of missiles and warheads and that these should be brought in on 22 November. Such a delay would not be critical for operational deployment at the end of December. The problem for the Germans was that if missiles and warheads were known to have arrived here before the Bundestag debate opponents of the Federal Government would argue that the debate was not genuine since Germany's allies were proceeding with deployment.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary pointed out that, given the uncertain touch displayed by West German parliamentary managers on this issue, there could be no certainty that the timing of the debate might not slip even further or that the German Socialists might not find some device by which to block final Bundestag approval for the deployment of Pershing II by 31 December. German officials had recently accepted that their problems would be eased if we were to make it clear at a suitable moment in public that although deliveries had begun on a contingency basis, Cruise missiles would not be operational in this country until 31 December and only then if no satisfactory agreement had been reached in Geneva. So, in effect, we could give the Germans what they wanted without damaging the timetable. The Defence Secretary commented that the Germans had seen our timetable and it was precisely that which worried them. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, referring to President Reagan's letter, said that it was clear that the Americans did not wish to see any change in our timetable. If we delayed deliveries, there was a possibility of this leaking and the impression of slippage would not help the German Government.

Summing up the discussion, the Prime Minister said that she thought that our basic message to Chancellor Kohl should be that we were under heavy pressure from President Reagan to stick to the deployment timetable. If this really caused the Germans difficulty, they should approach the US Government. In that event, the maximum delay which we could envisage was until 22 November. We might add the thought that it would be better if we stuck to the existing timetable and thus showed our firmness in carrying out NATO's decision.

There was a danger that the Soviet Union would produce a new proposal shortly before the Bundestag debate. This argued in favour of our sticking to the present timetable.

We should also send a suitable reply to President Reagan, making plain what we had said to Chancellor Kohl.

In view of the different attitudes which appeared to have been adopted by the White House on the one hand and Mr. Weinberger and Mr. Shultz on the other hand, the message to President Reagan

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should make it plain that the Defence Secretary had discussed this question with Mr. Shultz and Mr. Weinberger over a period of some weeks.

It was agreed that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Cabinet Office should revise the proposed messages from the Prime Minister to Chancellor Kohl and President Reagan and that these should be submitted to the Prime Minister for her consideration over the weekend.

I am copying this letter to Roger Bone (FCO) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

A. J. COLES

Richard Mottram, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence.

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