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From the Private Secretary

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MW

ARMS FOR ARGENTINA

At lunch on Sunday, I was subjected to a veritable barrage from Charlie Price and Ray Seitz on the subject of arms sales to Argentina. Their argument was that if the Argentiniens were denied A4 Skyhawk aircraft from the United States (and Israel), then they would buy F7 aircraft from China. Surely in these circumstances it would be better to agree to sales by the United States, which would give the Administration some control over types and quantities, than to give China a free hand to sell to Argentina. Moreover, opinion in the United States was finding it increasingly difficult to stomach what amounted to interference by the United Kingdom in intra-American affairs.

I deployed all the usual arguments in return: selling arms was not the best way to sustain democracy in Argentina, the fact that the Chinese were prepared to sell arms to Argentina was no reason why our friends should do likewise, would the Americans wish us to sell arms to Nicaragua? But it is another sign that the pressure is building up in Washington on this subject and we shall be lucky to get through to the end of the Reagan presidency without American sales (although Charlie Price admitted that the President would probably always yield to a strong personal appeal from the Prime Minister).

I am copying this letter to Brian Hawtin (Ministry of Defence).

C.D. POWELL

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