



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

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29 December 1988

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Dear Charles,

ccp (2)  
Prime Minister  
Agreed with this seems right.

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US Arms Sales to Argentina: The Way Ahead

One of our major objectives in dealing with the Bush Administration will be to ensure that they continue to seek our agreement in advance for all sales of significant US weapons to Argentina.

The present Administration have stuck scrupulously to the undertakings which President Reagan gave to the Prime Minister about this when the US lifted their formal embargo against Argentina (originally imposed on human rights grounds in the 1970s) in December 1983. Since then no US weapons to which we have objected have been supplied to Argentina.

The Foreign Secretary does not expect the new Administration will necessarily be ready simply to inherit this commitment without question. For some time now there has been a strong lobby in Washington determined to end what they see as a British veto on an important element in US policy towards Argentina. We shall need to make a determined effort to ensure that the arrangement which has served us so well (and has enabled us to avoid damaging rows within the Alliance) continues as we wish. Significant new arms deliveries to Argentina could have unwelcome implications for our own force levels on and around the Falklands. Moreover if the US position weakens our EC partners will have little compunction in following suit.

On the advice of the Ambassador at Washington, the Foreign Secretary will propose to raise the issue with James Baker if the visit to Washington in late February, goes ahead as planned (the Americans have not yet gone firm), after ensuring that the ground has been carefully prepared.

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The first step in such preparation would be for Sir Antony Acland to write to one of Mr Baker's senior appointees before the inauguration on 20 January, proposing a meeting at senior official level in Washington in early - mid February. David Gillmore, the Deputy Secretary responsible for the Americas, would be a natural choice for this task. Such a visit would be presented as providing an opportunity to go over a number of detailed points, including in particular issues relating to Argentina, in advance of the Foreign Secretary's own visit. Such an approach would make it difficult for the new Administration to take decisions on arms sales policy in advance of the Foreign Secretary's visit.

The next step, soon after the inauguration, would be for the Foreign Secretary to reinforce the Ambassador's letter with a message to Baker. Such a message from the Foreign Secretary would give a useful impetus to Gillmore's planned visit in February, which would be the third step in the process, (and could cover also the fisheries exchanges with Argentina).

We have considered whether it would be right for the Prime Minister to send a letter to President-elect Bush at this stage. The original US undertaking was given by President Reagan in a message to the Prime Minister in December 1983. But a message from the Prime Minister on this subject out of the blue now could look defensive, and in any case Mr Bush and his staff would need to be carefully prepared for it. It would be better to keep a possible message from the Prime Minister in reserve. In the light of the Foreign Secretary's visit, if could either set the seal on a new agreement or raise the stakes if that were to prove necessary.

This sequence would draw the new Administration step by step into a dialogue on the issue, while minimising the chances of a rebuff.

I am copying this to the Private Secretaries of members of OD (FAF) and to Sir Robin Butler's Private Secretary.

*Jens.*  
*Stephe Wall*  
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Private Secretary

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