



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

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*MF*

Prime Minister

A-J-C. 3/4.

Dear John,

Role of the UN Secretary-General

I understand that the Prime Minister has called for a note on the role of the Secretary-General in bringing matters before the Security Council.

Article 99 of the UN Charter says that the Secretary-General may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security. The Russians argue that this does not permit him actually to cause a meeting of the Council to be convened, but most others think it does. The Article has been used only rarely in recent years and the new Secretary-General would be likely to tread warily before taking such an initiative.

You will be aware that the Secretary-General has the right to use his 'good offices' to facilitate the peaceful settlement of disputes. This is not spelt out in the Charter but follows from the Secretary-General's position as one of the organs of the UN working to serve the purpose and principles set out at the beginning of the Charter. There are no formal restrictions on the exercise of these 'good offices' but in practice the Secretary-General would only move in close consultation with the parties to the dispute and, where the Security Council has been recently engaged, may be reluctant to do so without a request from the Council.

Incidentally the Prime Minister also asked which country would assume the Chairmanship of the Security Council in May. The answer is China.

*Yours ever,*

(F N Richards)  
Private Secretary

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