

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

PRIME MINISTER

FOREIGN AFFAIRS UNIT

Mr Pym sought me out at Brighton to say that he wanted to have a further talk with you about the foreign affairs unit in No 10. He emphasised to me his continued strong opposition to the setting up of such a unit, whomever it consisted of.

I said that you had been expecting to think further about this during the week after the Party Conference.

Mr Pym is abroad until Thursday, but asked me to say to you that he hoped he could have a talk with you before you made any firm decisions. He will be back for Cabinet on Thursday.

How would you like to proceed on this? Would you like first to have a talk with Sir Robert Armstrong and then a talk further with Mr Pym?

F.R.B.

8 October 1982

*I have made a firm decision and every day I realise how necessary it is to have a unit
been
strong
see Mr. Pym
Dunne
not*

Ref. A09398

PRIME MINISTER

Perhaps I should briefly amplify what I mentioned to you this morning about the Foreign Secretary's views on your proposals for a "foreign affairs unit" in No 10, with Sir Anthony Parsons.

2. The Foreign Secretary clearly believes, very strongly, that what is proposed would be very damaging to the morale of the diplomatic service (already bruised) - and he probably thinks that it would be seen as a "slap in the face" to himself. He thinks that it would be divisive, as between you and him; the Press, and the foreign diplomats, would be looking for differences and seeking to exploit them. It would affect the conduct of international relations, in that foreign ambassadors and others would go to Tony Parsons as well as, or even instead of, himself and the Foreign Office. However much you were determined to keep Tony Parsons to an advisory role and away from the day-to-day conduct of international relations, he could not (being who he is and what he would be) avoid being drawn in. We should thus (it is feared) drift inexorably, and perhaps quite fast, to a situation like that which prevailed (and was so damaging) in the United States when Kissinger and Brzezinski were at the White House, with open divisions between No 10 and the Foreign Office at the top of the foreign policy-making process, and separate operations being pursued.

3. I think that the Foreign Secretary fears these dangers, whether the unit is headed by somebody with the standing of Tony Parsons or by somebody of less exalted value and standing on the lines of the minute I put to you last month. Clearly the dangers would be diminished, and Foreign Office susceptibilities less outraged, if the head of the unit was somebody less exalted and conspicuous, and less of a visible challenge. Hence the suggestion that you might keep the unit itself at a middle level, but make sure that its head had access to Tony Parsons as a consultant - and no doubt to others similarly.

REA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

~~October~~
8 September 1982