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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

11 February 1985

NEW ZEALAND: NUCLEAR SHIP VISITS

When the New Zealand High Commissioner came to pay a farewell call this morning, the Prime Minister raised the question of nuclear ship visits to New Zealand. She described the attitude of the New Zealand Government as a "tragedy". British and American ships which visited New Zealand ports were in the area as part of their wider tasks of defending Western interests for which they had to be appropriately equipped. They could not be armed in one way for some parts of the world and in another for others. The Soviet threat could not be broken down so neatly into geographical areas. It was unacceptable that we could hand the Soviets the advantage of telling them which of our ships was or was not carrying nuclear weapons.

The High Commissioner said, speaking officially, that the New Zealand Government had entered into an irreversible commitment not to allow visits by nuclear powered ships or those carrying nuclear weapons. He would report the Prime Minister's remarks. Speaking personally, he shared her regret at the New Zealand Government's decision: it was the only issue on which Mr Lange had put a foot wrong.

The Prime Minister said that we must none the less look to the other aspects of our relationship and keep them in good repair. In particular we would continue to give New Zealand our full support on the issue of butter in the European Community. We had an obligation to do so in recognition of the support which we had received from New Zealand in the Second World War.

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