

Chile



NRPA

Rmt 2/5

FCS/80/94SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCEChile: Arms Sales

1. I have seen a copy of your minute of 21 April to the Prime Minister accepting my proposals that we should agree in principle to lift the embargo on the sale of arms to Chile but should postpone for the time being the announcement of our decision. The Prime Minister has since endorsed this position.
2. You went on to suggest that in the meantime there should be some modest relaxation of the embargo, e.g. by the supply of spares for equipment we have already supplied, in order to ease our return in the market when the embargo is finally lifted.
3. I agree that the present position under the embargo on the supply of spares for ships not covered by Memoranda of Understanding is anomalous. It is one of the many reasons for lifting it. However, I would regard any relaxation of the embargo, in advance of an announcement on its removal, as carrying real risks in parliamentary terms.
4. The Chile lobby maintains a close and active scrutiny of our relations with Chile. There has already been recently much ill-informed and misleading press speculation about the arms embargo. If it were to become known, despite statements that the embargo continues, that we were now selling arms previously embargoed, we would be in an untenable position in Parliament. The limited commercial gain we could expect from such sales before the embargo is completely lifted would not seem to justify the political risk.
5. I have no objection to a low-key visit to Chile by an official from the Defence Sales Organisation in due course.

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The appropriate timing could be determined after we have reached our decision on the announcement of the lifting of the embargo. I believe that, until then, such a visit might lead the Chileans to misunderstanding our position; and, if it received any publicity, would be embarrassing to us politically.

6. I intend meanwhile to keep consideration of the timing of an announcement under close review and to take further stock of the position before the summer recess.

7. I am copying this minute to the Prime Minister, other members of OD, the Secretary of State for Industry, the Attorney-General, the Lord Chancellor and the Secretary to the Cabinet.

C
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(CARRINGTON)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

21 May 1980

