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From the Secretary of the Cabinet and Head of the Home Civil Service

Sir Robert Armstrong GCB CVO

Ref. A086/131

13 January 1986

Dear Michael,

I should like to respond to what you said in your statement of 9 January about the record of the discussion when you raised the subject of Westland in Cabinet on 12 December.

I made the usual full minute of the discussion. I thought, however, that in view of its sensitive nature it would be better to do as is done from time to time in the case of especially sensitive records: not to include the full minute in the Cabinet minutes as generally circulated, but to prepare for inclusion in the circulated minutes a brief summary record. I extracted the first few introductory sentences and the last paragraph of the full minute to serve as a summary minute which recorded your view that it was necessary that there should be a further meeting of Ministers for which you could circulate a memorandum and the Prime Minister's summing up that the Cabinet could not consider the matter at that meeting without notice given and without papers or time for preparation, and that nothing had happened to invalidate or give grounds for reconsideration of the decisions taken at the meeting of the Ministerial Committee on Economic Affairs on 9 December.

I gave instructions for this summary record to be included in the minutes as circulated. Because of a misunderstanding in my office, for which of course I accept responsibility and which I much regret, this was not done and the minutes were circulated without any reference to the discussion of Westland. I did not discover this omission until a week later.

In 10 Downing Street before Cabinet on Thursday 19 December you mentioned to me that you wanted to have a word about the record of the previous week's discussion. At the time I assumed that you were referring to the summary record which I thought had been circulated. When I came later that day to prepare the minute of the discussion that morning, I discovered that the

The Rt Hon Michael Heseltine MP

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summary record of the Westland discussion had been omitted from the circulated minutes of the previous meeting, and I immediately arranged for it to be circulated as an addendum to those minutes.

On the afternoon of 19 December I sent your office an advance copy of the minute of the discussion of Westland that morning. You wrote to me on 24 December to thank me for that; in that letter you also said that you had since seen the addendum to the minutes of the meeting on 12 December, and that you would welcome a word with me about it after the holiday period. I sent a message to your office on 2 January saying that I was at your disposal to come across to the Ministry of Defence for such a discussion when you wished. I was not summoned; but in 10 Downing Street just before Cabinet on 9 January you told me that you still wanted to have such a discussion; I said that I was very ready to come across for the purpose. That was of course overtaken by subsequent events.

You have seen the circulated minute of the discussion on 12 December. I have the full minute on file here, and should be very ready to show it to you, if you would like to see it, when you can spare the time. You would see that it covered the points which you specifically said at the meeting you wanted to be recorded.

Yours ever
Robert