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16 October, 1986.

From the Private Secretary

Dear Colin,

**PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT MITTERRAND:
EAST/WEST RELATIONS AND ARMS CONTROL**

The Prime Minister gave lunch to President Mitterrand today. M. Attali was also present. This letter records their conversation about East/West relations and arms control to which they devoted virtually the whole of their discussion. The Prime Minister spoke very frankly, and would not want her comments to be circulated widely.

President Mitterrand opened by saying that the meeting was very timely in the light of the startling discussions which had taken place in Reykjavik. It was very important that he and the Prime Minister, as leaders of the two European nuclear weapons states, should make a joint assessment of those discussions. He wanted to know the Prime Minister's views before determining France's position.

The Prime Minister said that a great deal had changed in the past week. She agreed that Britain and France had a special role. Publicly the British Government had expressed full support for President Reagan's stand at Reykjavik, and in particular for his refusal to accept unreasonable constraints on the SDI. Privately she was alarmed at some of the proposals which had been made, without consultation with the Alliance. Nuclear weapons could not be treated in isolation without taking account of the overall balance of forces between East and West. The elimination of strategic ballistic missiles would undermine NATO's strategy, and would leave Europe exposed to the Soviet Union's vastly superior conventional forces. It would also raise doubts about whether the United Kingdom's agreement with the United States for the purchase of Trident would be honoured. She stressed that the United Kingdom had no intention of giving up its nuclear weapons. But the proposal was now on the table and would have

to be dealt with. The Reykjavik meeting had not been prepared thoroughly enough to justify an attempt to reach agreement. In retrospect, we had cause to be thankful that Soviet insistence on acceptance of their terms on the SDI had blocked agreement.

President Mitterrand said that Reykjavik was supposed to have been a meeting to set the agenda for a subsequent Summit. It had been a surprise to learn that substance was discussed, let alone that an attempt had been made to reach agreements, without adequate preparation. Even minimal agreements required months of detailed negotiation. He concluded that it had been done for domestic political reasons on both sides. He wondered how the Prime Minister explained this absence of professionalism.

The Prime Minister said that she could only speculate. President Reagan was a man with a dream of freeing the world of nuclear weapons. This was impractical. Nuclear weapons would always be needed. But dreams could be dangerous. They encouraged people to take risks. The Russians had read the President's psychology correctly, and offered concessions in line with his dream. In return they hoped to persuade him that SDI was unnecessary. But here they had miscalculated. The President did not see proposals for the elimination of strategic ballistic missiles as an alternative to the SDI, but as a further justification for it.

President Mitterrand said that Gorbachev had made clear to him when he had visited Moscow that he would need considerable concessions on SDI if agreements were to be reached to reduce nuclear weapons. President Reagan's offer not to deploy a strategic defence system for ten years was meaningless since there was no realistic prospect of developing such a system in ten years. He could not see why the Americans could not accept a twenty year delay or even longer. The Prime Minister said that the President's proposal nonetheless offered the Russians assurance against a break-out. She was convinced that the President was right not to accept the additional constraints on SDI research which the Russians had demanded.

President Mitterrand said that he entirely shared the Prime Minister's view that strategic nuclear weapons were essential. He would never negotiate away France's strategic forces. He was less concerned about INF and would be content to accept a zero-zero agreement in Europe. INF had only been introduced as a counter to the SS-20. He did not place much weight on the risk of decoupling the United States from Europe. Whether or not the Americans would use their nuclear weapons to defend Europe was a psychological question. The answer did not depend on the geographical location of those weapons. His worry about Reykjavik was that it would undermine confidence in the United States' guarantee. One could not be sure about the automaticity of an American nuclear response to Soviet attack on Western Europe. Indeed, one could argue that this automaticity had already been called into question by the SDI. The Prime Minister agreed that

questions had been raised in Reykjavik which neither Britain nor France had thought were questions. Proposals had been made which could undermine Europe's security in the longer term. But the Russians must not be allowed to succeed in dividing Europe from the United States. She believed that President Reagan would be absolutely firm in Europe's defence.

President Mitterrand asked what the Prime Minister intended to do. The Prime Minister said that she would visit Washington in November to talk these issues through step by step with President Reagan. She would explain that the elimination of nuclear weapons would expose the world to greater risks rather than achieve greater security. Several senior American officials, in particular Mr. Weinberger, would probably be unhappy with the proposal to eliminate nuclear weapons. Their support should be sought. But it was important to avoid a confrontational approach. At the same time it was clear that both the Americans and Russians were now alarmed at the impression that Reykjavik had brought arms control negotiations to a full stop. They were looking for ways to resume talking. She proposed to encourage the Americans to pursue negotiations for a 50% reduction in strategic nuclear weapons, an agreement on INF, based if necessary on zero-zero in Europe, a ban on chemical weapons, and restrictions on nuclear testing. She would also support the United States refusal to accept unreasonable restrictions on SDI. But NATO should be invited to examine the impact on the Alliance's strategy and the overall balance of forces of the proposal to eliminate strategic nuclear weapons. Perhaps she and President Mitterrand should both send messages to President Reagan on these lines.

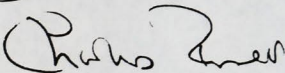
President Mitterrand recalled that France did not support SDI and had reservations about restrictions on nuclear tests. But otherwise he could support the Prime Minister's approach as representing a useful, practical outcome to their discussion. He would reflect on the possibility of a message. The Prime Minister said that Chancellor Kohl's support should be sought as well since he would be seeing President Reagan the following week. It was agreed that both the Prime Minister and the President would get in touch with Chancellor Kohl.

President Mitterrand said that Secretary Shultz had recently said to him that, while the French and British deterrents might be excluded from negotiations now, it would be much more difficult in five years time. He would resist inclusion of France's nuclear weapons in any negotiations. The Prime Minister said that the United Kingdom's nuclear deterrent was the irreducible minimum needed for our national defence. Logically it should be for the United States to make proportionately greater reductions in its own nuclear arsenal in order to leave the French and British systems untouched.

President Mitterrand noted Britain's technological dependence on the United States for its nuclear deterrent. In the light of what had happened at the Reykjavik meeting he wondered whether Britain and France should not look together

at the next generation of nuclear weapons. He was not pressing for this. It was the United Kingdom which faced the more acute problem. The Prime Minister said that she was not sure whether the phasing of British and French strategic programmes made this a practicable proposition. Trident would give the United Kingdom substantial advantages in range and sophistication, which would last well into the next century. But she would be ready to consider the scope for possible cooperation in some areas.

I am copying this letter to John Howe (Ministry of Defence) and Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

yours sincerely,


C.D. Powell

C.R. Budd, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.