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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

20 November 1986

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Dear Charles,

Anglo/French Summit: Defence and Arms Control Issues

Briefing for the Prime Minister's discussions in Paris on 21 November about East/West and arms control issues has been brought up to date in the light of her visit to the United States. But we have now received further indications of points on which the French may wish to focus. You will have seen Paris telegrams 1221 and 1226. I am commenting separately on the questions raised in these telegrams about the public handling of UK/French nuclear forces and arms control.

You may also find it helpful to have a short summary of the main points arising from the last round of the regular official level Politico/Military talks with the French, which were held yesterday in London. The French had asked that these be held as close to the Summit as possible and clearly saw them as relevant to its preparation.

The French stressed along familiar lines their serious reservations about a zero/zero agreement on INF and 50% START cuts. They were particularly interested in a detailed explanation of the terms of the Prime Minister's Camp David statement of 15 November, and in whether the UK thought the US would regard the continuing commitment to nuclear deterrence as overtaking President Reagan's proposals at Reykjavik. In general, they welcomed the statement, suggesting that this might form the basis for further discussions, particularly at the December North Atlantic Council.

The French confirmed their belief that a clear European voice is essential to bring home to the Americans our concerns about the possible implications of the current US/Soviet dialogue. They criticised the UK mildly during yesterday's talks for preventing a strong public message being given by last week's meeting of WEU Foreign and Defence Ministers in Luxembourg. Together with the Germans, Italians, and Netherlands, we had argued that this would be tactically misguided; that private bilateral representations, drawing on the broad basis of agreement among the Europeans, were more effective; and this did not mean that Europeans should cease to

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consult closely together. We repeated this line firmly, with reference to the results of Camp David, but the French are unlikely to be driven off their hankering for public positions different from those of the United States.

Defence Ministers will hold a thorough exchange of views on defence equipment collaboration and other aspects of the bilateral defence relationship. The French are increasingly acknowledging the significance of this. But they believe that more substance should be injected, primarily through a greater joint effort in armaments cooperation. M. Mitterrand may make this general point to the Prime Minister. He may also seek to clarify the particular position on AWACS/NIMROD. The Prime Minister might indicate in response that HMG aims to choose between these alternatives at the end of the year. But she might welcome in so doing the involvement of the French in the final stages of the Airborne Early Warning competition, and hold this up as a good example of Anglo/French cooperation which could open further doors in the future and have cost advantages for both countries.

At a separate press briefing on the Summit given yesterday by Derek Thomas, journalists indicated interest in the Anglo/French defence relationship, and asked about the possibility of future UK/French collaboration in the nuclear field in the wake of the visit to Paris in September by Dr Owen and Mr Steel. They may raise similar points with the Prime Minister at the Summit.

I am copying this letter to John Howe, who in addition to the above points, will wish to be aware of the particular French desire, indicated in Paris telegram no 1226, for Defence Ministers to compare views on the US thesis that air breathing systems could provide effective deterrence in the absence of ballistic missiles. This is an area where there is much common ground between the French and ourselves, and where discussions might usefully be followed up through discreet bilateral channels.

Yours ever,

Colin Budd

(C R Budd)
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq
PS/10 Downing Street

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