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10 DOWNING STREET

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From the Private Secretary

8 April 1989

SOVIET SUBMARINE

This is to confirm the information which I passed to you and the Ministry of Defence Resident Clerk during the night.

The Soviet Embassy telephoned me shortly after 0300 hours this morning to convey a message to the Prime Minister from Mr. Gorbachev about the sinking of the Soviet submarine north of Norway. The same message was being conveyed to President Bush and to the Norwegian Prime Minister.

Mr. Gorbachev wished the Prime Minister to be aware of an accident aboard a Soviet nuclear submarine north of Norway and in the vicinity of Bear Island. There had been a fire on the submarine and loss of life. Efforts to save the boat had failed and it had sunk in waters of a depth of some 1500 metres. The nuclear reactors had been shut down before the submarine had sunk. The risk of a nuclear explosion or contamination was assessed as negligible. Efforts to rescue the crew members were continuing. The assurance about the negligible risk of nuclear explosion or contamination was repeated.

I said that the Prime Minister would be grateful for this information. I knew that she would wish to pass on her condolences for the loss of life and would no doubt send a message to this effect to Mr. Gorbachev. I would report the information to the appropriate authorities.

Subject to your views, I suggest that we should tell the press in the course of the morning that this message was received during the night and refer in particular to the assurance to the negligible risk of nuclear explosion or contamination.

I am copying this letter to the Resident Clerk in the Ministry of Defence and the JIC Duty Officer in the Cabinet Office.

C. D. POWELL

The Resident Clerk,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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