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From the Private Secretary

9 January 1990

THE GERMAN QUESTION: OUR PUBLIC LINE

BF 11 The Prime Minister has seen Bonn telegram number 12 commenting on our public line on the German question. She thought it showed a lack of understanding of our policy which she finds alarming. She would like to see any reply before it is sent.

(CHARLES POWELL)

Stephen Wall, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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THE GERMAN QUESTION: OUR PUBLIC LINE

SUMMARY

[The cause we are] 1. DESPITE OUR SUPPORTIVE LINE ON THE GERMAN WISH TO ACHIEVE UNITY THROUGH SELF-DETERMINATION, THE UK IS PERCEIVED HERE AS PERHAPS THE LEAST POSITIVE OF THE THREE WESTERN ALLIES, AND THE LEAST IMPORTANT. NEED TO PRESENT OUR POLICY IN THE MOST POSITIVE LIGHT WE CAN. YOUR VISIT TO EAST BERLIN AND THE GDR AN OPPORTUNITY.

DETAIL

2. I REMAIN CONCERNED THAT DESPITE OUR CONSISTENT SUPPORT FOR THE PRINCIPLE OF GERMAN UNITY THROUGH SELF-DETERMINATION, THE UK IS PERCEIVED HERE AS OPPOSING, OR AT LEAST WISHING TO BRAKE, REUNIFICATION. THE FRENCH, ON THE OTHER HAND, WHOSE DOUBTS SEEM IF ANYTHING STRONGER THAN OURS, MANAGE TO MAINTAIN A MORE POSITIVE PUBLIC IMAGE (MITTERRAND'S REMARKS IN KIEV NOTWITHSTANDING). THE US ARE PERCEIVED AS THE MOST SUPPORTIVE OF GERMAN ASPIRATIONS EVEN WHILE LAYING DOWN CONDITIONS FOR GERMAN UNITY.

3. TWO RECENT BRITISH STATEMENTS HAVE STUCK IN GERMAN MINDS AND COLOURED THEIR PERCEPTION OF OUR POLICY. THE FIRST WAS YOUR COMMENT IN BERLIN ON 16 NOVEMBER THAT GERMAN UNITY WAS NOT ON THE AGENDA. THIS WAS TRUE AT THE TIME. BUT KOHL'S TEN POINT STATEMENT ON 28 NOVEMBER PUT IT ON THE AGENDA, EVEN IF WITHOUT A TIMETABLE. THE SECOND WAS THE PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT IN BRUSSELS ON 1 DECEMBER THAT REUNIFICATION SHOULD NOT TAKE PLACE FOR TEN TO FIFTEEN YEARS. THE LATTER CONTINUES TO BE QUOTED BY GERMAN COMMENTATORS AS EVIDENCE OF A NEGATIVE AND MISTRUSTFUL BRITISH ATTITUDE.

4. AS AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF BUSH'S POLICY OF A 'EUROPE WHOLE AND FREE', BAKER'S FOUR CONDITIONS FOR GERMAN REUNIFICATION HAVE BEEN WELL-RECEIVED HERE, BECAUSE OF THE SPIRIT THAT IS THOUGHT TO LIE BEHIND THEM AND BECAUSE THEY ARE SEEN AS DESIGNED TO FACILITATE, RATHER THAN PREVENT, GERMAN UNITY. THE SAME CANNOT BE SAID OF MITTERRAND'S CONTRIBUTIONS. IN BONN ON 3 NOVEMBER HE SAID HE HAD NO

FEAR OF GERMAN REUNIFICATION, WHICH POSED NO PROBLEMS FOR FRANCE. THREE DAYS LATER IN KIEV HE SAID REUNIFICATION 'IS NOT A QUESTION FOR NOW' AND THAT THE QUESTION OF FRONTIERS SHOULD NOT BE RAISED AGAIN. THE FACT IS THAT AS THE FRG'S BEST FRIEND AND MOST IMPORTANT EUROPEAN PARTNER, FRANCE CAN GET AWAY WITH A GREAT DEAL. IT IS CHARACTERISTIC THAT KOHL SHOULD HAVE VISITED MITTERRAND IN SOUTH-WEST FRANCE ON 4 JANUARY TO MEND FENCES. THE UK BY CONTRAST IS AT PRESENT SEEN AS NEITHER ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT NOR AS WELL DISPOSED. BOTH ASPECTS CAN REDUCE OUR INFLUENCE ON THE FRG AT THIS CRITICAL TIME.

5. YOUR VISIT TO EAST BERLIN AND THE GDR WHICH IS LIKELY TO BE WIDELY REPORTED HERE, PROVIDES AN IMPORTANT OPPORTUNITY TO TRY TO PUT A MORE POSITIVE SPIN ON OUR PRESENTATION. YOU COULD USE THE STRASBOURG/NATO FORMULAE (EAST BERLIN TELNOS 003 AND 007) BUT PRESENT THEM AS A STATEMENT OF BRITISH POLICY. YOU COULD ALSO DRAW ON OTHER ELEMENTS IN THE PUBLIC LINE RECENTLY PRODUCED BY THE DEPARTMENT IN CONSULTATION WITH THIS EMBASSY.

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