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Dear Geoffrey,

PROPOSED UK/USSR AGREEMENT ON CO-OPERATION IN THE STUDY
AND EXPLORATION OF SPACE

I have been following developments on this proposal with interest. I understand that the hope is that you should sign this agreement with Mr. Shevardnadze during the Prime Minister's visit to Moscow later this month.

I am aware that the agreement is concerned with promoting co-operation with the Russians in the scientific sphere, with the emphasis on the universities and such civil organisations as the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, but that industrial benefits are also hoped for. The industrial and political value of all this is, of course, for you and Paul Channon to judge and if you and he are satisfied that this is a worthwhile undertaking, I should not wish to oppose it. But you should be aware of my concerns.

The Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Howe QC MP



My first concern is that an agreement should not lead to any unwitting breaches of security or transfer to the Russians of technology of military relevance. Some of the areas of research listed in the draft agreement - for example sub-millimetre and infra-red astronomy - are enabling technologies in a military sense. They provide the scientific basis for the possible future development of weapons systems. Furthermore, the British National Space Centre (BNSC), which draws heavily on resources at the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough, has at its disposal only a small number of experts in a number of these fields, some of whom are concerned with both civil and military applications.

If the agreement goes forward, adequate procedural and physical safeguards will need to be established to prevent any possibility of damaging disclosures to the Russians. The provision in the draft agreement that specific programmes will be triggered by implementing protocols is important here.

I understand that the Board of Management of the BNSC, on which MOD is represented, will have the opportunity to vet all such protocols before they are agreed with the Russians. I regard this as essential, and will be looking to my representative on the Board to safeguard MOD interests. My people will also be considering what other safeguards are necessary in the run-up to the further discussions which will be required of the practical arrangements for BNSC's change of status to that of subordinate department, assuming that, as seems likely, E(A) endorse this



change later this month. I would merely add in passing that the existence of an agreement for co-operation with the Russians is not going to make the passage of information or exchange of personnel between MOD's space interests and the BNSC any easier; BNSC are aware of this and have no doubt taken this point into account.

My other concern is over the possible implications for our defence relations with the USA. If the Americans - notwithstanding the fact that they themselves have a similar agreement with the USSR - chose to regard the agreement now proposed as a reason or pretext for reducing the flow of sensitive defence information to our own Services, the impact on the operational effectiveness of the latter is potentially so damaging as to be a conclusive reason for not proceeding further with the present agreement. I was therefore glad to learn that our Embassy in Washington have considered this point carefully and concluded that the risk of informed adverse reactions in Washington is small; and that they are now briefing the Department of Defense and other agencies concerned in order to forestall and allay any fears. This is reassuring; but if subsequently they detect any serious objections to what we are proposing, we may need to take stock again.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Prime Minister and Paul Channon and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours ever,
George
George Younger