



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

6 September 1985

Dear Charles.

HETMAN: Timing of Action

At Sir Robert Armstrong's meeting yesterday morning to discuss the implementation of the decisions recorded in your minute of 4 September to Sir Robert, there was discussion of the timing of our action with the Russians. It was agreed that it was very important that all the necessary preparations (drafting of instructions, etc) should be absolutely right, and that this, together with the Prime Minister's wish to see the texts, ruled out action before the weekend. The consensus of the meeting was that in practice it was unrealistic to expect to be able to take action before next Tuesday.

This however raises a serious problem, in that both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, and also Malcolm Rifkind, the Minister of State responsible for East/West relations, will be out of London. The Foreign Secretary returns from Nigeria on Wednesday night. Malcolm Rifkind will be attending the inter-governmental conference of the Ten on Monday, and a crucial Political Cooperation Ministerial Meeting of the Ten on South Africa on Tuesday, both in Luxembourg. He cannot be back in London until Tuesday night.

The Foreign Secretary believes that there would be serious disadvantages in our taking action in the absence of a senior Minister in London able to explain our decision authoritatively in the face of the enormous media interest which we can expect. Action in the absence from London of both the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary could well be construed by the Russians and by the public as distancing ourselves from action which will have major international and domestic political consequences. Every day's delay does of course increase the risk of some action by the Soviet Government (eg Gorbachev's meeting with Sir Bryan Cartledge) which could have the effect of putting us in baulk. But given the length of time which has already elapsed since HETMAN's arrival in London, 48 hours delay is unlikely to be critical. He therefore reluctantly concludes that the best answer, despite the evident undesirability of delay, is to hold over our action until Thursday 12 September, when the Prime Minister and he will be back in London.

.../Against



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Against this background I should be grateful to know whether the Prime Minister is prepared for our action with the Soviet authorities in London and Moscow to be taken on Thursday.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Richard Hatfield in the Cabinet Office.

Yours ever,

Le Appleyard

(L V Appleyard)
Private Secretary

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