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From the Private Secretary
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15 September 1985

HETMAN

The Prime Minister held a meeting this evening with the Foreign Secretary and the Home Secretary to consider how we should react to the retaliatory expulsions by the Soviet Union of British Embassy personnel and others from Moscow.

The Foreign Secretary said that it was clear that we must make a further response. He thought this should take the form of the expulsion of four further people, chosen so as to avoid diplomatic or Service Attaché staff. This number would be sufficient to demonstrate firmness without necessarily provoking the Soviet Union to further retaliation. He was opposed to the introduction of further restrictions on the free travel area at this stage. But it might be possible to combine the four expulsions with disclosure of the activities for which the original 25 had been expelled.

In discussion it was suggested that four expulsions would not be seen by public opinion as an adequate response, and that the Soviet Union would draw the conclusion that it paid to be tough. We should not go to a third round of retaliation, which would risk ridicule. It was important therefore that our reaction at this stage should be and be seen to be sufficiently firm. Disclosure of details of the intelligence activities of the 25 who had already been expelled might rebound against

Further options identified were a higher number of expulsions; or combining four expulsions with further restrictions on the free travel area to bring it into line with the restrictions already in force in Moscow, i.e. by closing certain areas within the 25 mile limit. It was agreed that it would not be appropriate to go back on the concession which we had made on the ceiling for Soviet diplomatic staff.

The Prime Minister concluded that H.M. Ambassador Moscow's comments on the options should be sought urgently, and he should be given the opportunity to propose any alternative course which occurred to him. In view of the need to respond promptly, his comments should be sought by

SECRET AND PERSONAL

mid-morning on 16 September. Her own view remained that a further four expulsions on their own did not constitute an adequate response.

I subsequently sent a telegram in the terms above to H.M. Ambassador Moscow.

I am copying this letter to Hugh Taylor (Home Office), to Sir Robert Armstrong and Sir Anthony Duff.

(Charles Powell)

Len Appleyard, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.