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PRIME MINISTER

Mr Robert McFarlane's Visit:

During your discussions with Mr McFarlane you may wish to refer to the United States intention to amend their 1961 agreement for nuclear defence collaboration with the French. This would signal in a helpful way the importance which you attach to the proposed Cabinet Office/White House discussions on this issue which we have proposed.

BACKGROUND

2.

The amendment to the United States/French agreement, subsequently transmitted by President Reagan to Congress, restricts classified exchanges with the French to matters affecting nuclear weapons safety and security; wider discussions would require further amendments. It is unlikely that talks between the United States and France will start before summer 1986.

3. Our response to the Americans about their proposed initiative with the French was passed to Mr McFarlane in my telexed letter of 19 September. This underlined the significance to us of the United States proposal and requested Cabinet Office/White House discussions on the aims and implications of the proposed exchanges with the French.

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OUR OBJECTIVES

4.

The objective of the proposed Cabinet Office/White House discussions will be to find out more about United States intentions so that we can better assess whether we

could seek closer contact with the French without putting at risk our crucial nuclear relationship with the United States. Our motives for any closer contact with France could include:

- a. building up our relations with France as a counter-weight to the close co-operation between Paris and Bonn for the sake of our influence in the European Community as well as NATO;
- b. avoiding an erosion of our special position under the 1958 nuclear agreement with the Americans through the creation of a United States/French dialogue from which we should be excluded;
- c. technical benefits to our own nuclear programme.

CONCLUSION

5. When you see Mr McFarlane, I suggest that you should underline the importance which you attach to continued close liaison with the United States

The significance and potential value of the United States intention to breathe new life into this agreement is clear and this is why you have proposed early Cabinet Office/White House discussions to hear more of the United States plans. The questions of particular interest, set out in my letter, are:

- a. whether the United States hope the proposed exchanges on nuclear weapons safety and security will lead to discussions of other aspects of nuclear weapons technology;
- b. whether the United States have indications that France would be interested in developing a wider dialogue and the extent to which such dialogue might take place.

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c. whether,

the United States initiative on nuclear exchanges is part of a wider policy of building up defence relations with France and, if so, what the other elements of such a policy might be.

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

26 September 1985