



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

I have discussed with the Prime Minister your minute of 5 March regarding the suggestion by President Mitterrand that the Prime Minister should meet him for an informal and private talk about Mr. Gorbachev's latest arms control proposals.

Although the Prime Minister would, in principle, welcome such a talk, there are difficulties over timing. In particular, there seems no realistic prospect that she could meet President Mitterrand before her visit to Moscow. I have discussed with her the possibility of using the one free day which she has left (Sunday 22 March) to fly to Paris to see President Mitterrand and perhaps also on to Germany for a brief talk with Chancellor Kohl ahead of her Moscow visit. But she feels that this would leave her no time for contingencies and for catching up on other work. Subject to further reflection, she would prefer not to pursue this possibility.

Looking to the period after her Moscow visit, there is an additional complication in that she has invited M. Chirac to lunch with her at Chequers on 26 April to discuss the outcome of her visit to Moscow and the prospects for his own forthcoming visit. A separate visit to Paris before that might be overdoing it. It would of course take the gilt off M. Chirac's gingerbread.

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I think that the best course, therefore, is to say to M. Attali that the Prime Minister would welcome a chance for a talk with M. Mitterrand in due course and is grateful for his invitation. Sadly it is unlikely that she can take up his invitation before her own visit to Moscow. In any case, her understanding is that the President's position and her own on Mr. Gorbachev's offer are fairly close. If the President were content, she would like to be in touch with him in due course to propose a date, possibly at a weekend, when she might go over to Paris to talk with him.

C.D. POWELL
6 March 1987