



FIVE SW
cc: MOD.
Fes

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

23 March, 1983

Dear Dr Owen

I understand you have asked whether I would have any objection to your publishing the letter you sent me on 14 February and my reply of 9 March.

As you know, we have consulted the US State Department. I have to say that I agree with them that public debate about the details of the control arrangements for nuclear missiles can only be of help to the Soviet Union.

I leave it to you to decide in the light of this whether to publish our exchange of letters. *Personally, I would not do so.*

Yours sincerely
Margaret Thatcher

The Rt. Hon. Dr. David Owen, M.P.

SW



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10 DOWNING STREET

PRIME MINISTER

Here is a draft letter to Dr. Owen on the lines we discussed. I have cleared it with Clive Whitmore.

Background references:-

- Flag A Record of my conversation with Dr. Owen
- Flag B Telegram giving US views
- Flag C Your letter of 9 March
- Flag D Dr. Owen's letter of 14 February.

WR

22 March 1983



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

21 March, 1983

Dear Nick

We spoke this morning about Dr. Owen's correspondence with the Prime Minister about dual control, and in particular the control of Thor missiles.

As you know, Dr. Owen asked, towards the end of last week, whether the Prime Minister would have any objection to his publishing his letter of 14 February, and the Prime Minister's reply of 9 March. When we consulted the Prime Minister, she said that she would be content for this exchange of letters to be published, if the Americans had no objection.

I rang Dr. Owen this morning to explain to him that the State Department would prefer him not to publish the text of this exchange (Washington Telno. 700 of 20 March). I told Dr. Owen that the Americans were obviously concerned that debate about the details of control arrangements would rapidly stray into classified areas and could only be of help to the Soviet Union. Dr. Owen said that he could not accept that the exchange of letters should not be published. He was not trying to make a Party political point and would not publish anything in the week of the Darlington by-election; but the Government were wrong not to accept the case for dual control, and the information contained in the letters was important to the debate on this subject. If it would help us, he would accept some changes to the wording of the Prime Minister's letter, but the essential facts could not be suppressed. He went on to say that he was surprised that he had not been consulted by your Department during their investigations into the incident described in his letter of 14 February; he also said that he was shocked that neither Ministers nor the C in C Bomber Command (Air Vice-Marshal Menaul) had been informed of this incident at the time.

I told Dr. Owen that we had not yet informed the Prime Minister of the Americans' reaction and that I would not be able to do this until Tuesday evening. He said that he understood that we would not get back to him until at least Wednesday.

As I said on the phone, I should be grateful for your advice on whether there are any passages in the Prime Minister's letter that you would wish to amend before publication. I should also be grateful for your advice on whether you feel the Prime

/Minister

Minister should write a further letter to Dr. Owen, saying that she has no objection to his publishing these letters. This letter could put on record any further points you wish to make, and could be published at the same time as her letter of 9 March. You may, however, feel this is unnecessary.

I am copying this to Roger Bone (Foreign and Commonwealth Office).

Yours ever

Willie Rickett

N. H. R. Evans, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence

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TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 700 OF 20 MARCH 1983

AND TO IMMEDIATE MODUK (FOR RESIDENT CLERK), NO 10 DOWNING STREET
(DUTY CLERK)

MODUK SIGNAL 192130Z MAR 83: PRIME MINISTER'S CORRESPONDENCE ON
DUAL CONTROL OF THOR MISSILE.

1. THE STATE DEPARTMENT WERE GRATEFUL TO BE ALERTED TO THIS
PROBLEM. THEY WOULD BE HAPPIER IF DR. OWEN COULD BE PERSUADED NOT
TO PUBLISH THE TEXTS OF THIS EXCHANGE. BUT IF HE DECIDED TO
RELEASE AT LEAST HIS OWN LETTER, THEY WOULD PREFER THE RECORD BE
SET STRAIGHT BY PUBLICATION OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S LETTER.

2. THEY RECOGNIZE THAT THE LATTER DOES NOT INVOLVE MATTERS OF POLICY
OF DIRECT CONCERN TO THEMSELVES. BUT IN GENERAL THEY BELIEVE IT
PREFERABLE, WHERE POSSIBLE, TO AVOID DISCLOSURE OF SPECIFIC DETAILS
OF CONTROL ARRANGEMENTS BETWEEN US. IN THE SHORT TIME AVAILABLE
THEY HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO CHECK WHETHER IN FACT SOME ELEMENTS OF
THE PRIME MINISTER'S LETTER MIGHT HAVE BEEN BETTER CLASSIFIED.
ON THAT POINT THEY MUST RELY ON OUR JUDGEMENT.

FCO PASS TO NO 10 DOWNING STREET (DUTY CLERK)

WRIGHT

NNNN

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1180 12/13

PRIME MINISTER

Dr. Owen has asked whether he can make public the contents of this letter.

Mr. Heseltine's office tell me the Ministry of Defence have no objections.

Do you have any objections?

Could you possibly let the Garden Room girl know your reaction since Dr. Owen is very anxious to have an answer by Saturday morning, and will ring the Duty Clerk.

WR

18 March 1983

Dr Owen to phone on Sat.
He had commented that she was happy for her letter to be made public provided the US knew.
After consultations with TF I told Dr. Owen no decision could be reached until Monday morning.