



Box

10 DOWNING STREET

25th March 1985

MA

Thank you for your letter and note of 19th March. I am grateful to you for giving us the benefit of the doubt and withholding your very powerful letter to The Times.

In order that its merits do not go unobserved and unnoticed, I have had it turned into print and have put it into the Prime Minister's box for her to see. I expect that she will be underlining bits of it and saying "hear hear" to herself!

MICHAEL ALISON

Eldon Griffiths Esq MP

Handwritten - 12/18/18.

U. Govt 1 Nov. 18.

Convincing that - impossible?

LETTER FROM ELDON GRIFFITHS MP - TO THE EDITOR OF
THE TIMES 19.3.85 (WITHHELD)

Sir,

SDI

Having visited Washington about the time of the Prime Minister's historic speech to the United States Congress I could not believe my ears when I heard the first reports of our Foreign Secretary's contribution to the debate on SDI. I assumed he must have dreamed it up in the bath; but now that I have read his text and realise that the Foreign Office had been labouring on it for weeks, I share your concern that so cautious and perceptive a Minister should have said such unwise things at so inopportune a moment.

No-one can welcome the prospect of a trillion dollar round of East-West competition in the unilitarisation of space. Anyone with any inkling of the technological difficulties that a space-based defence system must surmount must also be ultra cautious about predicting success - as failure. SDI as yet is no more than an option - but, potentially, it is vastly more attractive than M.A.D.; it also takes account of the fact that the Soviets, for years, have been developing and deploying their own rudimentary anti-missile defence system.

Sir Geoffrey's language was urbane, circumlocutory and easily capable of being selectively quoted to prove that it was broadly in line with the Prime Minister's qualified support of SDI, when she met President Reagan at the White House. But as one who over 25 years has watched the fortunes of the Anglo-American

alliance wax and wane, and recently wax again (thanks largely to Mrs Thatcher and Mr Reagan) I fear this speech, unless it is quickly "explained" (or better still contradicted by Number 10!) will do untold damage to our trans-Atlantic relationship.

First, because it weakens Western solidarity at the start of the Geneva arms talks, while handing to Mr Gorbachov a diplomatic crowbar with which to prise apart the two sides of the Atlantic alliance.

Second, because it encourages the latent isolation and trade protectionism that already are starting to surface in the United States.

Third, because politics and business being what they are in America, it lessens the chances of the United Kingdom's being invited to participate in the vast - and potentially lucrative - US programmes of R & D into space vehicles and particle beam technology, not to speak of the damage it already may have done to the massive defence contracts British firms are pursuing with the U.S. Armed Forces. Britain missed the bus, thanks to Whitehall's pusillamity, when President Kennedy decided to send a man to the Moon. The Prime Minister, to her credit, sees the importance of our securing a piece of the action in SDI; but to judge by Sir Geoffrey's speech, the "better-notters" in the FCO once again are blind to the dangers of our missing the shuttle into space.

Sir, I do not suggest that HMG should run back U.S. policy uncritically. But the experience of a quarter century of dealing with Americans suggests that on nearly all major East-West defence and disarmament issues our two nations' interests are virtually identical, and that Whitehall is far more likely to influence Washington decisively by quiet persuasion

brought to bear privately, among friends, than by any amount of public disparagement, no matter how blandly phrased.

EG