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TO IMMEDIATE PARIS

TELEGRAM NUMBER 676 OF 19 DECEMBER

INFO PRIORITY WASHINGTON

PRIME MINISTER'S

PERSONAL MESSAGE

SERIAL No. T222A/83

MIPT: LAUNCHER FOR SKYNET 4

1. FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER  
TO M MAUROY.

BEGINS

DEAR PRIME MINISTER

WE EXCHANGED MESSAGES LAST MONTH ABOUT THE CHOICE OF LAUNCH  
VEHICLE FOR OUR SKYNET 4 SATELLITE SYSTEM. I WAS VERY GLAD TO  
RESPOND TO YOUR SUGGESTION FOR A TEAM FROM THE CNES TO VISIT  
LONDON FOR A FINAL DISCUSSION OF THE LAUNCH OPTIONS. I AM  
GRATEFUL FOR THE PROMPT VISIT BY THE CNES TEAM AT SUCH SHORT  
NOTICE AND FOR THE GENEROUS PROPOSALS THEY ADVANCED AT THAT  
MEETING.

I AM WRITING TO TELL YOU, BEFORE AN OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT IS  
MADE, THAT AFTER THE MOST CAREFUL CONSIDERATION WE HAVE NOW  
DECIDED THAT SATELLITES IN THE FIRST STAGE OF THE SKYNET 4  
PROGRAMME SHOULD BE LAUNCHED BY SHUTTLE. THIS HAS NOT BEEN AN  
EASY DECISION. IT IS BASED ON OPERATIONAL AND TECHNICAL FACTORS, AS  
WELL AS COST. MICHAEL HESELTINE IS WRITING TO  
M HERNU TO SET OUT OUR REASONS FULLY AND FRANKLY, BUT IN VIEW  
OF OUR SHARED CONCERN FOR THE ARIANE PROGRAMME AND THE INTEREST  
YOU HAVE TAKEN IN THE DECISION, I SHOULD LIKE TO MAKE SURE YOU  
ARE AWARE OF THEM TOO.

THE USE OF ARIANE WOULD CAUSE US CONSIDERABLE OPERATIONAL AND  
TECHNICAL PROBLEMS, IN ADDITION TO THE EXTRA EXPENSE IT WOULD

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INVOLVE. ON THE TECHNICAL SIDE, WE WOULD NEED TO REVIEW THE INTERFACE BETWEEN SATELLITE AND LAUNCHER, REVALIDATE THE STRUCTURAL DESIGN AND PREPARE A NEW MISSION ANALYSIS. THIS, TOGETHER WITH ASSOCIATED CONTRACTUAL NEGOTIATIONS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEW COMMUNICATIONS LINK BETWEEN KOUROU AND THE US, WOULD DELAY THE FIRST LAUNCH BY NINE TO TWELVE MONTHS.

FOR OPERATIONAL REASONS, THIS DELAY WOULD BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT. WE NEED SKYNET IN ORDER TO PROVIDE ESSENTIAL OPERATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS FOR OUR FORCES IN EUROPE AND THE ATLANTIC. IF THE PLANNED LAUNCH DATE OF NOVEMBER 1985 FOR THE FIRST SATELLITE COULD NOT BE MET, WE WOULD NEED TO PROCURE ADDITIONAL SATELLITE CAPACITY, AT GREAT EXPENSE. YOU WILL, I AM SURE, UNDERSTAND THE STRONG OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENT THAT OUR FORCES SHOULD HAVE THE VITAL COMMUNICATIONS THEY NEED, WHEN THEY NEED THEM, AND THE DANGERS THAT ANY GAP WOULD ENTAIL.

AS TO COST, I AM VERY GRATEFUL, AS I HAVE SAID, FOR THE EFFORTS YOU HAVE MADE TO HELP BRIDGE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ARIANE AND SHUTTLE. THE GAP NEVERTHELESS REMAINS VERY LARGE AND THERE IS ALSO THE COST OF ADDITIONAL AND EXTREMELY EXPENSIVE CAPACITY NEEDED AS A RESULT OF ANY DELAY WHICH THE SELECTION OF ARIANE MIGHT INVOLVE. AT A TIME WHEN WE ARE LOOKING VERY HARD AT WAYS TO CUT PUBLIC EXPENDITURE, WE WOULD FIND IT EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO ACCEPT SUCH COSTS.

I MUST EMPHASISE THAT OUR PLANNED USE OF SHUTTLE ON THIS OCCASION DOES NOT REPRESENT A WEAKENING OF OUR SUPPORT FOR ARIANE OR THE EUROPEAN SPACE INDUSTRY IN GENERAL. THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT REMAINS FIRMLY CONVINCED OF THE NEED FOR THE COUNTRIES OF EUROPE TO COLLABORATE WHEREVER POSSIBLE ON ADVANCED INDUSTRIAL PROJECTS OF THIS KIND. THE FACT THAT WE CANNOT ALWAYS SUCCEED, AS EVIDENCED NOT ONLY BY OUR CHOICE ON THIS OCCASION BUT BY YOUR OWN GOVERNMENT'S RECENT DECISION TO USE A US ENGINE FOR YOUR EXPERIMENTAL COMBAT AIRCRAFT, MEANS THAT WE MUST ALL KEEP TRYING.

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MICHAEL HESELTINE IS EXPLAINING IN HIS LETTER WAYS IN WHICH WE HOPE TO PUT ARIANE IN A BETTER POSITION TO BE CHOSEN AS THE LAUNCHER FOR THE SECOND STAGE OF OUR SKYNET PROGRAMME. THE SATELLITES WILL BE DESIGNED FROM THE OUTSET TO BE COMPATIBLE WITH BOTH ARIANE AND SHUTTLE, AND ARIANE WILL BE SELECTED IN THE COMPETITION PROVIDED THAT THERE ARE NO UNREASONABLE DISADVANTAGES RELATING TO COST, RELIABILITY OR MISSION COMPATIBILITY. WE ARE READY TO ESTABLISH A JOINT TECHNICAL POLICY GROUP OF OFFICIALS TO WORK TO MEET THIS OBJECTIVE.

FOR OUR PART, WE BELIEVE IT IMPORTANT THAT OUR DECISION ON THIS OCCASION SHOULD BE PRESENTED IN A WAY WHICH CAUSES THE LEAST POSSIBLE DAMAGE TO THE ARIANE PROGRAMME. WE SHALL WORK TO PRESENT IT ACCORDINGLY.

BEST WISHES

YOURS SINCERLY

MARGARET THATCHER

END OF MESSAGE.

HOWE

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