



AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION • LONDON

THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

PRIME MINISTER'S

PERSONAL MESSAGE

SERIAL No. T141 P/82

1 July 1982

Dear Prime Minister,

A telegram from my Prime Minister asks me to convey to you the following message:

"My dear Margaret,

Thank you very much for your letter about Invincible. I understand your views, although obviously they involve considerable disappointment for me and my Government.

We were surprised at the alternative offer of Hermes. I understand the sentimental value of Invincible after the Falklands war. However as a result of the Hermes refit, her superior carrying capacity and her command and control arrangements, she would seem better suited to your navy than ours. Would it not be better therefore still to consider one of the Invincible-class ships to be sold to us.

You will remember what I have told you about the political sensitivity in Australia of the question of our acquiring HMS Invincible and my request for an extension of time for our decision. The matter has been controversial in Australia but since our decision to accept your offer the public controversy has died away.

There has been public acceptance here also, I think, of the situation where in the light of your losses in the Falklands campaign you might want to retain HMS Invincible. What would still not be so readily understood, and frankly it takes me somewhat by surprise, is the thought that in retaining HMS Invincible you would be offering HMS Hermes as an alternative.

I would have some difficulty explaining to the Australian public a situation in which HMS Hermes, which is nearly as old as the Melbourne - which we

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have decommissioned - is either offered or accepted in lieu of HMS Invincible. The Australian public would undoubtedly ask why the British Government is not retaining HMS Hermes while we pursue our original arrangement. That the ship might still have many years of useful service ahead adds to this problem.

It seems to me that we are now talking about the disposition of four carriers and whether Britain or Australia runs the oldest of those carriers. That obviously becomes a very difficult question for us.

As a result of all this, I would like to accept your suggestion that a mission visit Australia urgently. I would expect that that mission be equipped at a very high level to discuss both policy and technical issues and also that it would be able to discuss a variety of options. I am sure you understand that the problems this situation has posed for our defence people are considerable.

Alternatively, if you prefer, my Minister for Defence could lead an appropriate team to Britain.

After that we should again be in direct contact. All this would obviously take a little time, even taking for granted that we both press ahead urgently.

Meanwhile, it is very important that Mr Nott say no more than you indicated in your letter and of course we will do the same.

Yours sincerely,
(Malcolm Fraser)"

Yours sincerely,

R.V. Garland

R.V. GARLAND

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher, MP,
Prime Minister
No. 10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1

OPS



Subject filed on
Defence, Sales, Pt2

PRIME MINISTER'S

PERSONAL MESSAGE

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PRIME MINISTER

CANBERRA

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I would have some difficulty explaining to the Australian public a situation in which HMS Hermes, which is nearly as old as the Melbourne - which we have decommissioned - is either offered or accepted in lieu of HMS Invincible. The Australian public would undoubtedly ask why the British Government is not retaining HMS Hermes while we pursue our original arrangement. That the ship might still have many years of useful service ahead adds to this problem.

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Meanwhile, it is very important that Mr Nott say no more than you indicated in your letter and of course we will do the same.

Yours truly
Theresa

The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.,
Prime Minister of Great Britain,
LONDON SW 1
UNITED KINGDOM