

TOP SECRET

Confidential Filing

House of Commons Defence Committee,  
Inquiry into Polaris Successor Systems.

PARLIAMENT

May 1980

| Referred to                    | Date | Referred to | Date | Referred to | Date | Referred to | Date |
|--------------------------------|------|-------------|------|-------------|------|-------------|------|
| <del>14.5.80</del><br>17.10.80 |      |             |      |             |      |             |      |
| PREM 19/321                    |      |             |      |             |      |             |      |

TOP SECRET

FOURTH REPORT FROM THE DEFENCE COMMITTEE 1980-81  
ON STRATEGIC NUCLEAR WEAPONS POLICY IS FILED IN YELLOW FOLDER  
AT REAR OF FILE.

## Published Papers

The following published paper(s) enclosed on this file have been removed and destroyed. Copies may be found elsewhere in The National Archives.

First Special Report from the Defence Committee, Session 1980-81 on Strategic Nuclear Weapons Policy; published by HMSO, 12 February 1981

Fourth Report from the Defence Committee, Session 1980-81 on Strategic Nuclear Weapons Policy; published by HMSO, 25 June 1981

**Note:** Although these papers are outside the dates covered by this file, they were found attached to it, so are therefore recorded here.

Signed AWayland Date 10 June 2010

**PREM Records Team**

*Mr. Whitmore MW.*



**CABINET OFFICE**

**With the compliments of**

*Mr. Wade-Gery*

**70 Whitehall, London SW1A 2AS**

**Telephone 01 233**



CABINET OFFICE  
LONDON SW1A 2AS

01 233 8373

Ref: B06039

17th October 1980

Dear Michael,

Not copied to No. 10.

Trident and the House of Commons Defence Committee

You wrote to me on 8th October about the line that might be taken in answering questions when the Ministry of Defence give evidence shortly to the Select Committee on Defence about the Trident decision.

I have had an opportunity of consulting colleagues here who, in liaison with the Civil Service Department, are concerned with general questions about relations between the Government and select committees. The line that officials should take in giving evidence about the background to the Trident decision clearly raises issues of exceptional sensitivity in the field of relations with the new departmental select committees. It is, therefore, of particular importance that the extent to which information is disclosed, or withheld, on this matter is fully consistent with the general principles on the disclosure of information laid down in the Memoranda of Guidance to Ministers (C(P)(80) 2) and to Officials appearing before select committees, and reaffirmed in the Government reply to the First Special Report from the Education, Science and Arts Committee (Cmd 7982). I enclose for ease of reference a copy of that report and of the letter from Clive Whitmore to Peter Shaw of 2nd June, copied to all Departments, confirming the Prime Minister's strong agreement with the lines to be taken in that reply with regard to the disclosure to select committees of information about the nature and scope of inter-departmental consultation.

Against that background, and whilst recognising the awkwardness of the questioning that may arise, we consider that officials will have to be somewhat less forthcoming in certain respects in their evidence to the Defence Committee than is proposed in your letter and in that from Moberly. We regard it of particular importance to maintain the firm line laid down by Ministers regarding the nature and extent of interdepartmental consultation, and also about information relating to the records of previous Administrations. At the same time, we need to avoid putting official witnesses in the position of having to deny the self-evident, or disavowing all continuity between Administrations, or of saying less than would be said in answer to a Parliamentary Question.

Accordingly, as regards the questions at (a) and (b) of paragraph 2 of your letter, and whether and what studies were undertaken during the time of the previous Administration, we suggest that witnesses should say, and present it if possible as self-evident, that in the nature of a major decision of this kind continuing official studies take place during successive Administrations. You could conveniently refer to the second of the two sentences from Dr Owen's pamphlet quoted in Patrick Moberly's letter.

M E Quinlan Esq. CB  
DUS(P)  
Ministry of Defence

/We would

We would, however, urge that witnesses should refuse to be drawn in any way into whether or not any particular studies were authorised by Ministers of the previous Administration. As you say, we should soon be on a slippery slope if we did otherwise, and what Hennessy and Freedman may have disclosed is, we suggest, largely irrelevant. The general impression to be conveyed would be that studies undertaken during previous Administrations were part of a general survey of options which any prudent Government would undertake. Clearly, however, there is no reason why you should not say that Ministers of the present Administration have authorised the most recent of these studies.

On any questions relating to which Departments were involved in these studies we should again advise that official evidence must be confined to the generality that other Whitehall Departments with a locus in the business are naturally consulted about a matter of this importance. We would see no objections to confirming if pressed that these included, for example, the Treasury and the Foreign Office, but we would suggest that any definitive list of Departments consulted should be avoided, and that witnesses should refuse to answer any questions as to whether any other particular Department was consulted or what advice they gave. There should be no reference to the Cabinet Office as a Department consulted: for these purposes I think we should stick to the normal line that the Cabinet Office's role is simply that of servicing the machinery of inter-ministerial and inter-departmental consultation. As you say, the decision-taking process is clearly of central interest to the Committee. But this was equally so in the case of the inquiry by the Education, Science and Arts Committee into the decisions on overseas students' fees. And the request for information on these matters was firmly resisted in the Government's reply.

We do not feel so strongly on potential questions relating to consultations with industry or with the Americans. As regards any consultations with industry, you will no doubt, however, wish to retain discretion to refuse to reveal whether particular firms were consulted. On the American aspect, we would only suggest a slight change of emphasis whereby, whilst stating that detailed talks began in the summer of 1979, you should seek to avoid revealing the negative, ie that such talks did not take place before the summer of 1979. You could draw attention to the communique issued after Mrs Thatcher's meeting with President Carter on 18th December 1979, which made it clear that Polaris replacement was discussed on that occasion.

I am sending copies of this to the recipients of yours, and also (at Robert Armstrong's suggestion) to Clive Whitmore in No. 10 and Robin Birch in the Chancellor of the Duchy's office.

R. L. WADE-GERY

17 OCT 1980



R.L. WADE-GERA

TOP SECRET

COPY NO. 2  
OF TWO COPIES

2



File [signature]

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

HOUSE OF COMMONS DEFENCE COMMITTEE:  
INQUIRY INTO SUCCESSOR SYSTEMS

The Prime Minister has seen your minute to me of 12 May on this subject. She has agreed the line which you recommend should be taken with the Secretary of State for Defence and I have written to Brian Norbury accordingly. However, she has commented that the Defence Committee are going to be very angry when they learn about the decision.

No doubt the Prime Minister is right. But, subject to your views, it seems to me there is singularly little that we can do about it.

M. O'D. B. ALEXANDER

[Handwritten initials]

14 May 1980

TOP SECRET



~~FILE~~  
CONFIDENTIAL



~~Copied to: Parliament:~~  
~~House of Commons Procedure:~~  
PT2.

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

14 May 1980

Dear Brian,

HOUSE OF COMMONS DEFENCE COMMITTEE: INQUIRY INTO SUCCESSOR SYSTEMS

The Prime Minister has seen the Secretary of State for Defence's minute to her of 9 May on this subject. She has agreed that the House of Commons Defence Committee's inquiry should be played long, as Mr. Pym suggests. She agrees that an effort should be made to keep the Committee happy by meeting their wishes so far as possible and that they might begin their work by making visits to Faslane and Rosyth.

I am copying this letter to John Chilcot (Home Office), George Walden (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), John Wiggins (HM Treasury), John Stevens (Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's Office), Murdo Maclean (Chief Whip's Office) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely

Richard Alexander

Brian Norbury, Esq.,  
Ministry of Defence.

CONFIDENTIAL

Prime Minister: Agree para 3?

Ref. A02149

Yes - but the Committee will be very angry if they find out the decision

Copy No. 1 of 3 Copies

Phm

MR. ALEXANDER

House of Commons Defence Committee: Enquiry into Successor Systems

In his minute dated 9th May the Secretary of State for Defence seeks the Prime Minister's agreement that he should "play it long" on the submission of Government evidence to the House of Commons Defence Committee on their enquiry into Polaris successor systems, and avoid an open breach with the Committee as long as possible.

2. At the time he sent his minute the Secretary of State for Defence was not aware of the Polaris successor timetable now proposed by the White House for an exchange of letters in the last week of June and a public announcement on 1st July. If this timetable can be achieved - and in many ways it suits us well - it should not be too difficult to string the Committee along for the next seven weeks, particularly with the Spring Bank Holiday intervening. It will be important to maintain the Committee's goodwill in order to do everything possible to ensure a favourable reception of the public announcement in the House when it is made. This is particularly desirable, because there will probably be complaints that a policy decision of this magnitude should not have been taken before a major Commons debate on the issue.

3. The proposed timetable is at present very sensitive. I therefore recommend that the Prime Minister reply to the Secretary of State for Defence by agreeing to his suggestion to play this long, but accepting the desirability of keeping the Committee happy by meeting their wishes so far as possible, particularly in regard to their proposed visits to Faslane and Rosyth which, as he says, raise no real security problem. It might indeed be usefully suggested to the Committee that they ought to start their enquiry by making these visits in order to improve their understanding of the practical issues involved.

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

12th May, 1980



TOP SECRET

CONFIDENTIAL

SECRET

Reference is made to the report of the Committee on the subject of the proposed amendments to the Atomic Energy Act of 1954.

In the course of its study, the Committee has received many suggestions from interested parties. It has also held numerous public hearings and has received many suggestions from interested parties. It has also held numerous public hearings and has received many suggestions from interested parties.

The Committee has considered the suggestions and has concluded that certain changes are warranted. It has also held numerous public hearings and has received many suggestions from interested parties. It has also held numerous public hearings and has received many suggestions from interested parties.

0081  
11 12 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

The Committee has concluded that certain changes are warranted. It has also held numerous public hearings and has received many suggestions from interested parties. It has also held numerous public hearings and has received many suggestions from interested parties.

ROBERT ARMSSTRONG

CONFIDENTIAL

TOP SECRET



MO 8

PRIME MINISTERHOUSE OF COMMONS DEFENCE COMMITTEE:  
ENQUIRY INTO SUCCESSOR SYSTEMS

/ The House of Commons Defence Committee (as I have learned from the attached press release they issued on Wednesday!) have decided to conduct an enquiry into Polaris successor systems. I have to decide the degree to which I should respond to the request for extensive oral and written evidence from the Ministry of Defence that they will undoubtedly be making.

The subject of the enquiry and its timing are unfortunate. I told the Chairman, Sir John Langford Holt and his deputy, Dr Gilbert, last December that it would be very difficult for me to grant the Committee any facilities, or prepare any papers if they were to pursue such an enquiry. In my speech in the Defence Debate on 20th April I declined to publish a Green Paper but undertook, as you know, to inform Parliament in depth of the facts bearing on the decision how to maintain the effectiveness of our deterrent as soon as we had announced it; I indicated that I would like to publish a substantial document giving the fullest account that security will permit of all of the considerations involved. (Work is in hand on this and I believe we should be able to give a good account of ourselves.) I believe that this is an entirely defensible position and that until we have announced our decision we should resist any pressure by the Select Committee to provide evidence, either by written papers or by the appearance of witnesses from MOD or other Departments.

I understand that the Committee wish to take evidence from Defence witnesses and also from British Shipbuilders, British Aerospace, and academics such as Ian Smart, David Greenwood, Frank Barnaby and Farouq Hussein. They may also



have it in mind to talk to Lord Carver. Other ideas which the Committee have discussed include visits to the United States to see the cruise missile manufacture and the Trident building yard, after hearing presentations from the manufacturers in England. Visits to Rosyth Dockyard where the current SSBN fleet is refitted and to Faslane to learn how the current Polaris force operates are also on the cards.

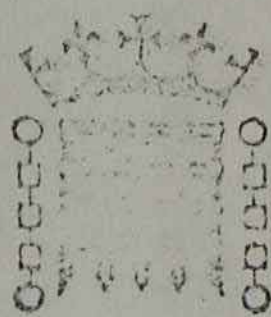
I consider that I should seek to play this long, and to avoid - or at least postpone for as long as possible - any open breach with the Committee. I can try to persuade the Committee informally to take evidence from non-official witnesses first, and to start with their visits with Faslane and Rosyth (which should not raise any real security problems). I would take a fresh look at the matter if a time comes when the Committee pursues the issue to a direct collision, for example by making a formal order for an official witness to appear.

I should be glad to know whether you would be content with this general approach.

I am copying this minute to the Home Secretary, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and the Chief Whip; and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Ministry of Defence

9th May 1980



COMMITTEE OFFICE  
HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA  
01-219 3280/81 (Direct Line)  
01-219 3000 (Switchboard)  
DEFENCE COMMITTEE

DA 14

Inquiry on Strategic Nuclear Weapons Policy

Notes by the Clerk to the Committee

1. Terms of Reference:

The terms of reference are:

That the Committee should make an inquiry into the following aspects of the decision to replace the Polaris SSBN force:

- (i) the alternative forms of replacement;
- (ii) the costs involved;
- (iii) the possible consequences for the remainder of the defence budget;
- (iv) the timescale of acquiring, constructing, and bringing a replacement into effective service;
- (v) the industrial and employment implications for British industry of replacement systems;
- (vi) when the various decisions must be taken consequent on the decision to replace Polaris.

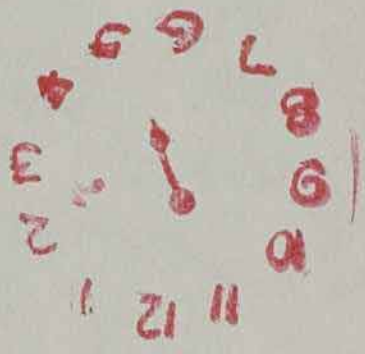
(Agreed to by the Committee on 12th March)

2. Alternative Forms of Replacement

At the meeting of the Committee on 30th April it was agreed that there were possibly six options under (i) of the terms of reference:

- (a) running on Polaris (as suggested by Alford in Adelphi paper 156-The Future of Britain's Deterrent Force)
- (b) purchasing Trident missiles to be installed in new British-built submarines
- (c) purchase or development of Ground Launched Cruise Missiles ) based on
- (d) purchase or development of Air Launched Cruise Missiles ) US
- (e) purchase or development of Sea Launched Cruise Missiles ) technology
- (f) developing of replacement system in collaboration with France.

Evidence would need to be sought from potential manufacturers of the various systems and sub-systems, from the Ministry of Defence and possibly the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.



9 MAY 1980

