

TOP SECRET

MT

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Confidential Filing

Correspondence from Dr Owen  
on control of their missiles  
in Britain. And Physical Control of  
nuclear Weapons Systems deployed in  
the UK

REFERENCE

December 1982

Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date
<del>23.3.83</del>							
<del>31.3.83</del>							
18.11.83							
PREM 19/975							

S  
808



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

TELEPHONE 01-218 9000  
DIRECT DIALLING 01-218 6.1.6.9

D/S of S/221/83

18th November 1983

*DF*  
*21/11*

Thank you for your letter of 10th November about the question of the physical control of nuclear weapons systems deployed in this country or operated by British forces. Let me deal with some of the points you raised in your reply to my own letter which itself dealt with a simple factual point. *will request if required*

You mention precedent and make much of what Mr Harold Macmillan did about THOR. The arrangements for THOR need be seen in the circumstances of the time, but I agree that they are relevant to today's arguments in one sense. All so-called "dual key" arrangements including THOR, whatever the actual form of physical control involved, have operated on the basis that one country owns and operates the delivery system and another (the US) controls and supplies the warhead. The Government considered "dual key" for cruise missiles on this basis and for reasons which have been explained many times - including the opportunity cost to our conventional defence effort - concluded that the balance of advantage clearly lay against acquiring it.

It is disingenuous of you to compare the sailing of a submarine from port with the launching of a cruise missile. As you well know, the comparison with sailing from port is deploying the cruise missile

The Rt Hon Dr David Owen MP



off-base on a routine training exercise. There is a comparison you could have drawn between the launching of a cruise missile from British territory and the Poseidon case, and that, of course, would be with the firing of a Poseidon missile from a US submarine in a British port or British territorial waters. Both cases concern missiles which you allege represents the key distinction in this argument. But you may be reluctant to go down this road since Governments of which you were a member were content to accept that Polaris and Poseidon missiles in US submarines that could be launched from British territorial waters should be governed by the arrangements originally agreed by Clement Attlee - that is that their use in these circumstances should be a matter of joint decision by the President and the Prime Minister. They did not argue that this arrangement should be supplemented by some form of joint physical control or "dual key". I think that successive Governments have been absolutely right to take that line. That is the line that this Government has taken over cruise missiles.

On the other points in your letter, I must say I was surprised by your conclusions that Britain's position as a nuclear weapon state and our arrangements for joint decision-making render us more liable to attack. You clearly see the joint decision-making argument to be sufficiently watertight to be credible in Soviet eyes. But I am not sure how you see that our position as a nuclear weapons state makes us more liable to attack. The Alliance's strategic nuclear forces, including our own Polaris capability, provide backing for other nuclear forces in this country and act as a deterrent against Soviet nuclear attack. It is for this reason that the need for such forces has been supported by successive Governments since the war.

Finally, you mentioned France. I suggest that one reason why the French Government's nuclear weapons policy carries conviction with its people is that politicians across a broad spectrum sustain this policy both in and out of Government. In this country the



consensus on defence since the war which has served us so well has been broken, but not by this Government. We have considered very carefully the issues involved here and all the precedents. We have reached a view in the best interests of the country in line with the approach of previous Governments: we will not change it in search of short-term party political advantage.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Michael Heseltine". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent loop at the end.

Michael Heseltine

21 NOV 1983





cc FCO  
7700  
IG

VC

Defence

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

31 March 1983

Dear Mr Owen,

Thank you for writing to me again on 23 March.

I am bound to say that I am somewhat surprised by the contents and tone of your letter. You originally wrote asking me to investigate the incident which had been related to you. This we did, and did with some urgency. Now you complain that I failed to write a private and confidential letter; but I am not at all clear what purpose such a letter would have served. You have alleged that I failed to take up your suggestions about the conduct of the investigation, or to follow up the information which you had. But I must point out that shortly after you wrote to me with your proposals, the Ministry of Defence reported the results of their enquiries to me; and I passed these straight to you inviting you to let us know of any further information you might have which would add to what we had discovered.

In my letter to you of 9 March, I spelled out the facts fully and frankly. They show, as you recognise, that while there were some mechanical faults with the Thor control system, the essential principle of two-man operation was preserved; and this answered the concern which you originally expressed. You asked about publication of our correspondence, and I felt it right to consult the United States Government, a proposition which you readily accepted. My view remains that nothing would be gained by publication, and that there is a danger that the incident will be inflated and exploited by people who do not have our best defence interests at heart. But as I made clear in my letter of 23 March, the decision is entirely yours.

/ I appreciate

HL

I appreciate that you are convinced about the desirability of a "dual key" system of control for the cruise missiles. I do not believe, however that the Government can be accused of turning its back on this question. We have considered the alternatives to the present arrangements very thoroughly indeed, but we remain satisfied that the arrangements for joint decision-making which have governed the use of United States forces in this country for over thirty years are as effective and appropriate as they have always been.

In all this, I firmly believe that what matters is that we should maintain deterrence and thus preserve the peace and freedom which we in this country enjoy. It is crucial for this purpose that the Russians continue to find credible the Alliance's strategy of deterrence. For them to do that, they must see that the Alliance can stand together and adhere to decisions that they have taken together. Against this background I am sure it would be wrong to depart from arrangements which we, like successive Governments, have found to be fully effective.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Thatcher

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



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1  
Telephone 01-930 7022 ~~XXXX~~ 218 6169

D/S of S/62/83

30th March 1983

*Dear Willie,*

In your letter dated 23rd March, addressed to Nick Evans, you enclosed a copy of a further letter of the same date to the Prime Minister from Dr David Owen MP; and you asked for a suitable draft reply for the Prime Minister to send.

I attach a draft for the Prime Minister's consideration. I doubt if the Prime Minister would wish to become involved in a detailed exchange with Dr Owen about the merits of "dual-key", or any of the other substantive issues raised in his most recent letter. Inevitably, the tone of the letter must depend on the Prime Minister's judgement; but the attached draft is aimed at avoiding giving Dr Owen further cause or material for publication. In case he does decide to publish all the correspondence, the final paragraph of the draft is designed to provide a more emphatic statement of the negative aspects of any change to physical "dual-key" control.

A press line on a release of the correspondence might be along the following lines:

- a. there is nothing to add to the detail set out in the Prime Minister's letter: it shows that although there were one or two faults in the system, the overall security and safety of the system was not jeopardised. The missiles could not have been fired by one man acting alone;
- b. the Thor was a first generation missile system withdrawn from service 20 years ago. Thor can in no sense be compared to cruise missiles, which are designed to take advantage of major advances in technology over the last quarter of a century;
- c. the Thor experiences described in the correspondence in no way makes a case for dual key control of cruise missiles. The Prime Minister has said repeatedly that our arrangements for joint decision with the Americans on the use of cruise missiles have been reviewed recently and are perfectly satisfactory.





Finally, the response to the question "why were Ministers and senior officials not informed?" might be to the effect that "it is not possible, at this distance in time, to comment on what was reported at the time and to whom; those concerned were rightly giving priority to making sure that the fault was quickly rectified".

No doubt you will let me know if you require any further information.

A copy of this letter goes to Roger Bone (FCO).

Yours ever,  
Bary Neale

(B P NEALE)

conqueror

DRAFT

Thank you for writing to me again on 23rd March.

I am bound to say that I am somewhat surprised by the contents and tone of your letter. You originally wrote asking me to investigate the incident which had been related to you. This we did, and did with some urgency. Now you complain that I failed to write a private and confidential letter; but I am not at all clear what purpose such a letter would have served. You have alleged that I failed to take up your suggestions about the conduct of the investigation, or to follow up the information which you had. But I must point out that shortly after you wrote to me with your proposals, the Ministry of Defence reported the results of their enquiries to me; and I passed these straight to you inviting you to let us know of any further information you might have which would add to what we had discovered.

In my letter to you of 9th March, I spelled out the facts fully and frankly. They show, as you recognise, that while there were some mechanical faults with the Thor control system, the essential principle of two-man operation was preserved; and this answered the concern which you originally expressed. You asked about publication of our correspondence, and I felt it right to consult the United States Government, a proposition which you readily accepted. My view remains that nothing would be gained by publication, and that there is a danger that the incident will be inflated and exploited by people who

do not have our best defence interests at heart. But as I made clear in my letter of 23rd March, the decision is entirely yours.

I appreciate that you are convinced about the desirability of a "dual key" system of control for the cruise missiles. I do not believe, however, that the Government can be accused of turning its back on this question. We have considered the alternatives to the present arrangements very thoroughly indeed, but we remain satisfied that the arrangements for joint decision-making which have governed the use of United States forces in this country for over thirty years are as effective and appropriate as they have always been.

In all this, I firmly believe that what matters is that we should maintain deterrence and thus preserve the peace and freedom which we in this country enjoy. It is crucial for this purpose that the Russians continue to find credible the Alliance's strategy of deterrence. For them to do that, they must see that the Alliance can stand together and adhere to decisions that they have taken together. Against this background I am sure that it would be wrong to depart from arrangements which we, like successive Governments, have found to be fully effective.

Defense: David Owen

↑ Those missiles Re'82



MAR 15 1982

ack'd. 23/3 etc

From: The Rt Hon Dr David Owen MP

Prime Minister

Dr Owen tries to put me  
back back in my court.

WM  
23/3



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

23 March 1983

We must check  
the way with great care -  
but we must answer  
to all their  
points

The Rt Hon Mrs Margaret Thatcher MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London SW1

Dear Prime Minister.

As you know there have been a number of discussions over the last week with your Private Secretary over the publication of our correspondence and I agreed to stop publication while the United States were consulted. I have now received your letter of today's date.

I am extremely unhappy about the way you have handled this issue. It was open to you at any time to write to me a private and confidential letter but you have never sought to do so. You have never taken up my offer to put my information to anyone you choose to investigate the matter, either the Secretary of the Cabinet or Sir Anthony Duff. Nor have you taken up my alternative suggestion of referring the matter to the Security Commission. I can only assume, therefore, that you do not wish the information in your letter to be classified in any way and as you know I have explained to your Private Secretary that if there were any parts of the letter that by inadvertence had been included, which should be classified, I would be quite happy for any exclusions to be made.

You conclude that public debate about the details of the control arrangements for nuclear missiles can only be of help to the Soviet Union. I assume that it is not the disclosure of the facts of the situation that concern you but the revelation that the mechanical arrangements covering six of the 60 Thor missiles were defective for a number of years. Yet it is quite clear from the procedures that were adopted that despite the fact that one key turned both locks the other control arrangements were sufficient to have ensured that no Thor missile could ever have been fired without the specific authority of the British Government through the action of an RAF technician manually operating valves and switches to allow the automatic launch sequence to start.

What I think you ignore in your letter is that there is already considerable public debate in this country about the control arrangements for any Cruise

/...



missiles, if they were to be deployed, and judging from what Michael Heseltine said yesterday it appears that the Government are becoming resigned to the fact that Cruise missiles are likely to be deployed. I still hope that the INF negotiations will be successful and that the Soviet response will be sufficiently constructive in relation to the deployment of SS-20s that it will not be necessary to deploy Cruise missiles. Whatever the outcome you know that it is my carefully considered view that Cruise missiles should not be deployed in Britain without it being clearly seen that Britain is physically involved in the launch mechanism and thereby, in effect, has a finger on the safety catch.

I regret that this has become a matter of political debate and that you have not followed the precedent established by your predecessor, Harold Macmillan, in granting dual control. The wish for dual control is now one which has wide support in the House of Commons, including a not insubstantial number of your own Members of Parliament. It is supported by a wide range of public commentators, including powerful editorial support for the dual key mechanism from the Sunday Times, the Daily Telegraph and the Daily Mail. This issue cannot therefore be avoided and those of us who believe that you should introduce a dual key mechanism believe that it would strengthen the British and US position in relation to the Soviet Union.

I do not believe it would be right for me to suppress what happened 21 years ago, purely and simply because it might be embarrassing. I recognise that one runs the risk of the unilateralists exploiting the issue but how much more would they exploit the argument if they believed that I had been party to a conspiracy of silence on this issue. There are legitimate anxieties which I believe Parliament ought to debate, for instance, why Ministers were not informed about this issue in 1962 and why you were not able to substantiate my information by documentary evidence but had to question officers who served with the Thor force. I do not think you would deny that were such a comparable incident to occur in 1983 you would expect to be informed immediately about it.

It is my judgement that your continued refusal to consider a dual key mechanism, against the background of this incident, is wholly unjustified. I do not believe the Government's case is helped by quoting a grossly exaggerated cost to Britain of £1 billion to introduce such a mechanism. It is firmly in the interests of the United States that any deployment of Cruise missiles in Britain, were it to be necessary, carries the support of the people of this country. All past experience indicates that the American Government would not seek to impose such a heavy financial cost on Britain. But even were this to be the case, I suspect that the British people, as Harold Macmillan wisely recognised in 1958, would be prepared to pay a price for the certain knowledge that any missile with a US nuclear warhead could under no circumstances be launched without the full involvement of British Service personnel acting on the specific instructions of the Prime Minister of the day.

/...



If you personally do not want me to publish the correspondence I would of course find this argument far easier to accept if you were to tell me that you were prepared to look again at the whole question of dual key or that you were referring the matter to the Security Commission, as I suggested. Unless you can produce any other arguments I feel the public are entitled to know about this incident.

*John Henry  
David Owen*

DAVID OWEN



11  
23 Nov 1983  
D 42  
B 9  
B 7





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



3

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

B  
OWONFO 002/20

00 FCO DESKBY 202300Z

00 MODUK

GR 170

CONFIDENTIAL

DESKBY 202300Z

FM WASHINGTON 202215Z MAR 83

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

Mutated to Chequer  
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.



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

9 March 1983

*C RM*  
*CTHOP*  
*IG*  
*Francis Owen.*

When I wrote to you on 23 February, I said that I would write again when we had carried out some more detailed enquiries into the incident you described involving the Thor missile. Since then I have received your letter of 25 February. In the meantime I have had a report from Michael Heseltine about his further enquiries and I thought that I should let you know the outcome of these immediately.

We have been unable to find any documentary evidence to substantiate the story precisely as it was related to you. But a number of officers who served with the Thor force have been interviewed and we have established that there was in the early 1960s an incident which bears some resemblance to the one which you described, although it did not involve a situation in which the man alone could have fired a missile. An RAF technician discovered during routine servicing of an inert missile that a British key turned the USAF lock. A comprehensive check of the other missiles revealed that this was also the case for one other USAF lock. All the locks were changed as a result.

Nonetheless, the fact that the UK and US keys were occasionally interchangeable did not mean that one person could gain control of the system. The launch countdown required the use of both keys to complete the launch sequence: the UK key which had begun the process of activating the missile had to remain in place as the US key was inserted some minutes later to begin the activation of the warhead. Furthermore, the key holders (the US Authentication Officer and the RAF Launch Control Officer) were never alone in the control trailer when a live missile was on standby - the standard complement in the trailer was five (4 RAF and 1 USAF),

/all

all of whom had a part to play in the launch sequence. More importantly, the engagement of the keys was only one element in a complex missile launching procedure in the early stages of which it was necessary for a technician, located at the actual launch site some 150-200 yards from the trailer, manually to operate valves and switches to allow the automatic launch sequence to supply the missile with fuel, liquid oxygen and electrical and hydraulic power.

I hope that this will reassure you on the Thor missile. I think that you will agree that we have taken the matter you raised in your letter of 14 February very seriously indeed and enquired into it as fully as we can at this remove in time. In these circumstances I do not believe that much more would be gained by involving the Secretary of the Cabinet. But if you have more information which you think we should have, Michael Heseltine would be happy to see you about it.

More generally, you referred to the comment I made in my letter of 17 January that you had not dissented on the dual key issue at the time the deployment decision was made. I did not of course mean to imply by this statement that you took a decision while in office; but to remind you that when the decision was announced in December 1979 you made to the best of my knowledge no reference to the issue. I entirely agree with your proposition that the question is too important to become a matter of party politics; and I recognise that your concern reflects a concern which is felt by others as well. I do assure you, however, that we as a Government have given very careful thought to the matter, and we have satisfied ourselves that the existing arrangements for joint decision-making give us the control we need.

Yours sincerely

Raymond Storer





MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1  
Telephone 01-~~XXXXXX~~ 218 6169

D/S of S/62/83

8th March 1983

PM's letter to David Owen  
dated 9/3/83 removed  
by WR on 18/3

Dear Willie,

If it is not too late, and if the Prime Minister has not yet written to Dr David Owen MP along the lines of the draft which I supplied with my letter of 4th March (and which I discussed yesterday evening with John Coles), could I take this opportunity of passing to you a couple of minor amendments to the draft letter which have been proposed by Mr Peter Blaker, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces?

Paragraph

Mr Blaker has proposed that the wording in the fifth line of the second on the first page of the draft might read: "..... 1960s an incident which bears some resemblance to the one which you described; although it did not involve a situation in which one man alone could have fired a missile. An RAF technician .....".

Perhaps you would care to consider incorporating these proposed changes in the draft letter from the Prime Minister to Dr Owen?

Yours ever,  
Barry Neale

(B P NEALE)  
Private Secretary

W F S Rickett Esq



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1  
Telephone 01-250 7092 218 6169

D/S of S/62/83

4th March 1983

*re. Lynn letter*

*AN 7/3*

*Dear Willie,*

You wrote on 28th February, enclosing a copy of a letter to the Prime Minister from Dr David Owen MP, who was replying to the Prime Minister's of 23rd February about the control of Thor missiles when they were based in this country.

I enclose a draft letter which the Prime Minister might send to Dr Owen, responding to his two letters of 14th and 25th February.

We have conducted extensive checks on our records for the period when Thor missiles were deployed in this country, but we have been unable to trace any documentary evidence to substantiate Dr Owen's story. We have also seen and interviewed a number of RAF officers, both retired and still serving. From the recollections of such people we have been able to reconstruct a detailed picture of what was involved in operating the Thor missiles; and we have established that there was at least one incident which bore a very marked resemblance to the one described by Dr Owen. The draft letter attached has been produced in the light of our researches, and does try to show that there is no question of this Department trying to cover anything up.

Regarding Dr Owen's suggestion that the Secretary of the Cabinet or Sir Antony Duff should personally investigate his allegations, the view taken after consulting Sir Robert Armstrong is that there would be no overriding advantage in this, and anyone else would only have to go over the ground which we here have already covered, almost certainly without being able to add anything. This question must, of course, be a matter for the Prime Minister's political judgement, but our view is that there is no need for her to agree to Dr Owen's suggestion.

*Yours ever,  
Barry Neale*

(B P NEALE)  
Private Secretary

W F S Rickett Esq

DRAFT REPLY FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO DR DAVID OWEN

When I wrote to you on 23 February I said that I would write again when we had carried out some more detailed enquiries into the incident you described involving the Thor missile. Since then I have received your letter of 25 February. In the meantime I have had a report from Michael Heseltine about his further inquiries and I thought that I should let you know the outcome of these immediately.

We have been unable to find any documentary evidence to substantiate the story precisely as it was related to you. But a number of officers who served with the Thor force have been interviewed and we have established that there was in the early 1960s an incident similar to the one which you described. An RAF technician discovered during routine servicing of an inert missile that a British key turned the USAF lock. A comprehensive check of the other missiles revealed that this was also the case for one other USAF lock. All the locks were changed as a result.

Nonetheless, the fact that the UK and US keys were occasionally interchangeable did not mean that one person could gain control of the system. The launch countdown required the use of both keys to complete the launch sequence: the UK key which had begun the process of activating the missile had to remain in place as the US key was inserted some minutes later to begin the activation of the warhead. Furthermore, the key holders (the US Authentication Officer and the RAF Launch Control Officer) were never alone in the control trailer when a live missile was on standby - the standard complement in the trailer was five (4 RAF and 1 USAF), all of whom

had a part to play in the launch sequence. More importantly, the engagement of the keys was only one element in a complex missile launching procedure in the early stages of which it was necessary for a technician, located at the actual launch site some 150-200 yards from the trailer, manually to operate valves and switches to allow the automatic launch sequence to supply the missile with fuel, liquid oxygen and electrical and hydraulic power. [This was, in effect, an early example of the operation of "the two man principle" which is standard practice today with all nuclear systems, and to which you properly ascribe great importance in your letter.]

I hope that this will reassure you on the Thor missile. I think that you will agree that we have taken the matter you raised in your letter of 14th February very seriously indeed and inquired into it as fully as we can at this remove in time. In these circumstances I do not believe that much more would be gained by involving the Secretary of the Cabinet. But if you have more information which you think we should have, Michael Heseltine would be happy to see you about it.

More generally, you referred to the comment I made in my letter of 17th January that you had not dissented on the dual key issue at the time the deployment decision was made. I did not of course mean to imply by this statement that you took a decision while in office; but to remind you that when the decision was announced in December 1979 you made to the best of my knowledge no reference to the issue. I entirely agree with your proposition that the question is too important to become a matter of party politics; and I recognise that your concern reflects a concern which is felt by others as well. I do assure you, however, that we as a Government

have given very careful thought to the matter, and we have satisfied ourselves that the existing arrangements for joint decision-making give us the control we need.

A.F.C.  $\frac{7}{3}$

4 MAR 1968

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3 2 1



10 DOWNING STREET

PRIME MINISTER

---

Dr. Owen hopes that our investigations into the alleged breakdown of dual control of Thor missiles some time ago can be speedily conducted.

He suggests that Sir Robert Armstrong or Anthony Duff *Check!* should be put in charge. *FERB*

*WR* *we will let you have a reply*

*mt*

28 February 1983



Dr. David OWEN, 91P

cc CO

4/3

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

28 February 1983

Willie

Barry Neale tells me this  
came over on Friday morning.  
Have you received it? Kay  
7/3

Thank you for your letter of 21 February, and for the draft reply for the Prime Minister to send to Dr. David Owen. As you will know, the Prime Minister wrote as drafted on 23 February. This has prompted the attached reply from Dr. Owen. He hopes that your investigations can be dealt with speedily, and suggests that the Secretary or Deputy Secretary of the Cabinet should be put in charge of them.

I should be grateful for a draft reply for the Prime Minister's signature as soon as possible, preferably before the end of this week.

I am sending a copy of this letter and its enclosure to Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

WR

Barry Neale, Esq.,  
Ministry of Defence.





10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

28 February 1983

I am writing on behalf of the Prime Minister to thank you for your further letter of 25 February. A reply will be sent to you as soon as possible.

W. F. S. RICKETT

The Rt. Hon. Dr. David Owen, MP.

From: The Rt Hon Dr David Owen MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

25 February 1983

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London SW1

*26/2*

*Dear Mrs Thatcher*

Thank you for your letter of 23 February. I am, of course, ready to make available all the facts that I possess but I would like to know a few more details about the investigation. This is a very grave matter and I have deliberately decided to put the matter initially to you and not to seek publicity. I am quite confident, from further information that I have received, that the events that I outlined to you did in fact take place. But I think it is not unreasonable for me to request that the investigation is dealt with speedily, within a matter of 2-3 weeks, and with a degree of authority.

I wonder if you would consider asking the Secretary of the Cabinet, or Sir A Duff, to personally investigate the matter in which case I would be very happy to deal with either direct. An alternative would be the Security Commission but I would imagine that they would not be familiar with a lot of the technicalities and they may not be able to report within a matter of weeks.

*Yours sincerely  
David Owen*

David Owen

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28 FEB 1983

CONFIDENTIAL



cc mol MF

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

23 February 1983

Mr. In. Owen

Thank you for writing to me on 14 February about the control of Thor missiles when they were based in this country.

I must say that there is no confirmation from immediately available sources of the alleged events which you have reported in your letter, and it will therefore be necessary to undertake a detailed investigation of the whole matter. In view of the passage of time since the alleged events are supposed to have taken place, it may take a little time to complete our enquiries.

I will of course write to you again just as soon as we have completed our enquiries; but I thought you should know that these might take a little while.

Yours sincerely

Raymond Baxter

The Right Honourable Dr. David Owen, M.P. —

all



902

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1  
Telephone 01-~~92070222~~ 218 6169

D/S of S/PS/10

21st February 1983

*Dear Willie,*

*AO 22.  
14/2/83 to see  
2 GRV  
12/2/83  
Wm 22/2*

In your letter of 15th February to Richard Mottram, you asked for a draft reply for the Prime Minister to send to Dr David Owen MP, who had written to her on 14th February about the question of control of the "Thor" missiles based in the UK over 20 years ago.

In view of the passage of time since the alleged events to which Dr Owen refers, it will be necessary to check out the facts very carefully indeed, and if necessary interview those personnel who were involved, so as to obtain their version of what might have happened. This may take a little time, and in the meantime you may consider that the Prime Minister should send a short acknowledgement to Dr Owen. I attach a draft for your consideration.

*Yours ever,  
Barry Neale*

(B P NEALE)

W F S Rickett Esq

DRAFT INTERIM REPLY FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO DR DAVID OWEN MP

Thank you for writing to me on 14th February about the control of Thor missiles when they were based in this country.

I must say that there is no confirmation from immediately available sources of the alleged events which you have reported in your letter, and it will therefore be necessary to undertake a detailed investigation of the whole matter. In view of the passage of time since the alleged events are supposed to have taken place, it may take a little time to complete our enquiries.

I will of course write to you again just as soon as we have completed our enquiries; but I thought you should know that these might take a little while.

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file RAO  
15 February 1983

I am writing on behalf of the Prime Minister to thank you for your letter and enclosure of 14 February.

I will place this before her at once and you will be sent a reply as soon as possible.

WR

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

AB



Dr. DAVID OWEN MP 22/2  
dual key control + cruise  
missiles



file

see

NB

Copy of reply

to Jan Kydd

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

15 February 1983

I enclose a copy of a letter to the Prime Minister from the Right Honourable Dr. David Owen, M.P., with which he encloses one that he has sent to your Secretary of State, largely about dual-key control and cruise missiles.

I should be grateful if you could let me have a suitable draft reply for the Prime Minister to send to Dr. Owen as soon as possible.

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

W. P. S. BICKETT

Richard Mottram, Esq.,  
Ministry of Defence



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

PPS

8  
15

14th February, 1983

Rt Hon Mrs Margaret Thatcher MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London  
SW1

*David Owen*

I enclose a copy of a letter I have sent to Michael Heseltine concerning arrangements for the control of the launch procedures of cruise missiles. However, I am writing to you on a related matter which concerns information I have been given surrounding dual control which I have not sought to use and on which I would be grateful for your confirmation as to whether the events I outline below actually happened. If they did in fact occur, I think you would be the first to recognise that serious questions are raised, in that the Thor missile could in fact for some years have been launched by one person.

I gather that launch of the Thor missile was initiated by an RAF officer with a 15 minute countdown proceeding to within 1½ minutes of launch. At that point the countdown was automatically held unless the USAF officer, acting on command, authorised its continuation. The actions of each officer consisted of turning a key in the control panel. I have been told of a potentially disastrous event which occurred which resulted in no accident and was known to very few people. The two launch control officers were required to remain at post throughout their duty shifts. On one occasion a USAF officer left his post and stepped outside. The 'RAF' officer now sitting alone at the joint control panel took out his key and tried to insert it in the lock operated by the USAF officer's key. It turned, and at that point the whole system was under his sole control.

I am told that as a result there was a rapid refitting of all locks throughout the system. But for some three years up to that time, the dual control stretching through separate channels of communication up to the Heads of State had been at risk and it was only the fact that dual control existed which alerted the RAF to the situation. Either the British or the American officer could have fired this missile, in flagrant breach of the fundamental principle that no one person can ever fire a missile. The mistake would never have been discovered if there had not been RAF participation and we would have been blissfully unaware that a single US officer was in complete control.

Of course, if my information is incorrect then I am very relieved, but if it is correct I suggest to you that it is only a matter of time, given the present public concern, before these facts come to light, with a very adverse effect on the whole public debate. If this incident did happen, of itself it is a justification for the introduction of a dual key mechanism

In your letter to me of 17th January you said "As you know, the option to purchase cruise missiles and their launchers (but not warheads), which would have given us physical control, was one which we decided against in 1979. I do not think that you yourself took a different view on this point at the time." I have gone carefully over my papers and I can find no ministerial decision which is in any way compatible with a decision having been taken by the last Labour Government to reject dual key arrangements for ground launched cruise missiles and if you are being fed this information, it is in my judgement incorrect. It could be argued that my party political position would be helped now by going along with the Sunday Times story that the last Labour Government made a decision over ground launched cruise missiles. In fact it did not do so; what it did do of course was participate fully in the NATO preparatory work which led up to the decision which your Government must have made when it took office.

I only mention this because I do not see any advantage whatever for any of us in trying to make a party political point on the issue of dual key. A dual key mechanism for cruise missiles is now an essential element in carrying public confidence in the dual track decision of 1979. I hope you will now announce your intention to seek an agreement with the United States over a dual key mechanism and that by doing so this will strengthen the US negotiation position in the INF talks because it will become apparent to the Soviet Union that British public opinion would be prepared if necessary to accept cruise missile deployment, having been satisfied on the control mechanism.

*I am for obvious reasons not at this stage making this announcement public.*

*David Owen*

David Owen

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION

For answer on: Thursday, 17th February, 1983  
(DAY) (DATE)

If ORAL  
insert X

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If for  
WRITTEN  
ANSWER  
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If for  
PRIORITY  
WRITTEN  
insert W  
and give  
date for  
answer

Name...The Rt. Hon. Dr. David Owen MP.....

Constituency (.....Plymouth Devonport.....):

To ask...The Secretary of State for Defence.....

(TITLE OF MINISTER)

If, in the event of deployment of Cruise missiles in Great Britain, any RAF personnel accompanying a ground launched cruise missile off the air base will operate under a separate chain of command from the USAF personnel, and whether the same procedures over launch and countdown will be in operation as was the case for the Thor missile.

Signed.....



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

17 January 1983

RM

c.fo

~~CF~~

Dear Mr Owen,

Thank you for your further letter of 22 December, about cruise missile deployments in Britain.

Cruise missiles, should they be deployed here, will certainly represent a change in the American nuclear forces based in Britain since we have not hosted US land-based missiles for some years. But the part they play in the strategy of deterrence and their capacity to prevent the Russians threatening NATO from a Soviet sanctuary will be similar to that of the F-111 aircraft which have been based here for many years. Our aim, I believe, must be to generate the same public confidence in the Anglo/US arrangements covering the cruise missiles and their bases as has long existed for the F-111 bases and indeed the bases of other US nuclear forces in this country.

You contrast the arrangements foreseen for cruise missiles with those governing the Lance missile system. The case of Lance is rather different, not because it is deployed in central Europe, but because we chose to purchase the missiles and their launchers, as have the other European allies who operate this short-range missile system. As you know, the option to purchase cruise missiles and their launchers (but not warheads), which would have given us physical control, was one which we decided against in 1979. I do not think that you yourself took a different view on this point at the time.

/I cannot

JCP

I cannot accept your charge that the decision to base cruise missiles here has not been fully debated in the House. Subsequent to the debate in January 1980 we have had three debates on nuclear defence issues and following the last one, on 15 December, the vote again endorsed Government policy. The NATO Alliance has taken its decision. We must now show firmness in implementing this decision, both in respect of deployment and in negotiation at Geneva, if the Russians are to be brought to abandon their present unreasonable position. Nevertheless, I fully agree that Parliament should continue to have the proper opportunity to express itself on these important matters and I intend to ensure that this is so.

As for negotiations, the 'zero option' remains far and away the best goal for the negotiations. But we have all along made it clear that we shall listen to and consider very carefully serious Soviet counter-proposals. Secondly, the deployment programme is far from irreversible. Even if the first deployments do have to take place at the end of this year, the five year programme for the basing of cruise and Pershing II missiles in Western Europe could be stopped, changed or reversed at any time if agreement at Geneva permitted it.

Yours sincerely  
Raymond Hester

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





Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

PS

R

10 January 1983

cc:IG ✓

*Amendment made. AR 14/6*

*1 Mr Coles: any comments?*

*2 GR: Please type WR 11/1*

*John Helling*

Thank you for your letter of 23 December enclosing one from Dr Owen of 22 December continuing his correspondence with the Prime Minister about the control of cruise missiles and the need for Parliament to make its views known.

I enclose a draft reply which has been agreed with the Ministry of Defence.

*See memo*

(R B Bone)  
Private Secretary

W Rickett Esq  
10 Downing Street

Defence :- Nuclear Release Procedure



DRAFT: minute/letter/teleletter/despatch/note

TYPE: Draft/Final 1+

FROM:

Reference

The Prime Minister

DEPARTMENT:

TEL. NO:

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION

TO:

Your Reference

- Top Secret
- Secret
- Confidential
- Restricted
- Unclassified

The Rt Hon Dr David Owen MP

Copies to:

House of Commons

LONDON SW1A 0AA

PRIVACY MARKING

SUBJECT:

.....In Confidence

Thank you for your further letter, of 22 December, about cruise missile deployments in Britain.

CAVEAT.....

Cruise missiles, should they be deployed here, will certainly represent a change in the American nuclear forces based in Britain <sup>since</sup> ~~inasmuch as~~ we have not ~~been~~ <sup>hosted</sup> ~~host to~~ US land-based missiles for some years. But <sup>part they play in the strategy</sup> ~~their role in the spectrum~~ of deterrence and their capacity to prevent the Russians threatening NATO from a Soviet sanctuary will be <sup>similar to that of</sup> ~~the same as has characterised~~ the F-111 aircraft <sup>which have been</sup> ~~based~~ here for many years. Our aim, I believe, must be to generate the same public confidence in the Anglo/US arrangements covering the cruise missiles and their bases as has long existed for the F-111 bases and indeed <sup>the bases of</sup> ~~other~~ US nuclear forces ~~bases~~ in this country.

Enclosures—flag(s).....

You contrast the arrangements foreseen for cruise missiles with those governing the Lance missile system. The case of Lance is rather different, not because it is deployed in central Europe, but because /we

we chose to purchase the missiles and their launchers, as have <sup>the</sup> other European allies who operate this short-range missile system. As you know, the option to purchase cruise missiles and their launchers (but not warheads), which would have given us physical control, was one which we decided against in 1979. I do not think that you yourself took a different view on this point at the time.

I cannot accept your charge that the decision to base cruise missiles here has not been fully debated in the House. Subsequent to the debate in January 1980 we have had three debates on nuclear defence issues and following the last one, on 15 December, the vote again endorsed Government policy. The <sup>NATO</sup> Alliance has taken its decision. We must now show firmness in implementing this decision, both in respect of deployment and in negotiation at Geneva, if the Russians are to be brought to abandon their present unreasonable position. Nevertheless, I fully agree that Parliament should continue to have the proper opportunity to express itself on these important <sup>matters</sup> ~~motions~~ and I intend to ensure that this is so.

As for negotiations, ~~we are well conscious of the need for flexibility.~~ Although the 'zero option' remains far and away the best goal for the negotiations, <sup>but</sup> we have all along made it clear that we shall listen to and consider very carefully serious Soviet counter-proposals. Secondly, the deployment programme is far from irreversible. Even if the first deployments do have to take place, at the end of this year, the five year programme /for

- 3 -

for the basing of cruise and Pershing II missiles in Western Europe could be stopped, changed or reversed at any time if agreement at Geneva permitted it.

AR 14/11.



10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

23 December 1982

You will have received a copy of the letter that the Prime Minister sent to Dr. Owen on 21 December in reply to his letter of 8 December about the control of cruise missiles, and the question of a further Parliamentary debate on nuclear weapons.

I now attach a further letter from Dr Owen, in which he argues once more that a dual key system for cruise missiles, and a further Parliamentary debate, are necessary if we wish to retain public confidence. I should be grateful if you could provide a draft reply for the Prime Minister's signature, to reach me by Monday 10 January.

I am copying this letter and enclosure to Richard Mottram (MOD) and David Heyhoe (Lord President's Office).

W. F. S. RICKETT

Roger Bone, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

de 13

DB



10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

23 December 1982

I am writing on behalf of the Prime Minister to thank you for your further letter of 22 December.

I shall of course place this before her and a reply will be sent to you as soon as possible.

W. F. S. RICKETT

The Rt. Hon. Dr David Owen, MP.

D89



10 DOWNING STREET

PRIME MINISTER

David Owen argues once more that a dual key system for cruise missiles, and a further Parliamentary debate, are necessary if we wish to retain public confidence.

---

We will let you have a draft reply.

cm

nd

23 December 1982

From: The Rt Hon Dr David Owen MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

22 December 1982

The Rt Hon Mrs Margaret Thatcher MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London SW1

*See page 10/11*

*attached*

*gr.*

*This is not now attached.*

*Pl. link up. Kay 18/1*

Thank you for your letter. In as much as you appear not to have totally closed the door on either of the two suggestions I put to you, I am relieved. But I hope you will take the opportunity of the Christmas Recess to think a little more deeply over your reply. No where in your letter do you recognise that a decision to deploy Cruise missiles in Britain, which I hope will not be necessary, would represent a considerable change in the US nuclear presence in the UK. I reminded you of the precedent that had been established over Thor missiles and we agreed about the arrangements which operated at that time. The different arrangements for other systems to which you refer have, of course, never applied to land-based missile systems and the arrangements operating when I was Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, to which you also refer, covered in the main American aircraft based in the UK and capable of carrying nuclear weapons. But even during my time in office the Lance missile system - admittedly deployed in Central Europe - but used by BAOR was operated under an electronically controlled dual key arrangement.

I have never given any credence to the belief that we would not have any part in the decision-making process in relation to Cruise missiles and all my public statements have made this clear, but I think you underrate the extent to which it is necessary in order to retain public confidence to apply the same arrangements for the control of any future US missile systems as was done in the past when Mr Harold Macmillan was Prime Minister.

As to the debate and vote in the House of Commons when the outcome of the INF negotiations are known late in 1983, your suggestion that this could be covered by a debate on the Defence Estimates in the Spring totally misses the point. You also quote the January 1980 debate. I might point out that that was on the Adjournment of the House on which only 52 Members voted against and the Official Opposition party abstained. At that time and still to this day I believe there was a majority in the House of Commons for the twin-track decision but that should not be taken as giving you and your Government a carte blanche to deploy Cruise missiles if you happen to

/...



feel unsatisfied with the Soviet response in the negotiations. Of course, if there has not been an Election and you are still in Government at the time you will want to come to the House with a recommendation but to deprive Parliament of the right to make the decision is, in my view, totally wrong on an issue of such importance. Again, I believe it is necessary to give this commitment in order to retain public confidence. /

Mr Andropov in his speech outlining a Soviet initiative in the INF talks has started a process of public debate on the reasonableness or unreasonableness of the Soviet negotiating position that is likely to continue throughout most of 1983. During this process of negotiation it will be necessary for NATO to hold its unity and to negotiate toughly though I hope also constructively. If the public knows that it is not necessary to take a committed position during the negotiating process and if Parliament knows this, there is much less likelihood of the NATO negotiating position being undermined. The tradition, as you well know, of negotiations whether involving domestic or international matters is for Parliament to hold its hand and await the outcome of the negotiations before making a final decision.

I hope, on reflection, that you will see the wisdom of such a course and make the necessary commitment which I think will be widely welcomed both by MPs of all parties and the broad span of opinion in the country that wants nuclear arms reductions but also wants to ensure that we do nothing to put at risk the proper defence of our country and that of our friends and allies.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Owen', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

David Owen





10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

21 December 1982

*John R. Owen*

Thank you for your letter of 8 December about the Question you put to me in the House on 2 December.

I have noted your comments on the question of a dual-key system for cruise missiles. In the absence of satisfactory results from the Geneva arms control negotiations, cruise missiles will be deployed in this country at the end of next year to bases which, as we have repeatedly made clear over the past three years, will be subject to the Attlee-Truman agreement reconfirmed by President Truman and Mr. Churchill and detailed in a communique in January 1952.

As you say, the Thor missile system, which was deployed here for five years from 1958 to 1963, was governed by an arrangement which was "dual-key" in the sense that the RAF manned the delivery system while the Americans retained control of the nuclear warhead. But there have of course been different arrangements for other systems. Apart from Thor, the arrangements under successive governments - including the one in which you were Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary - have been those set out in the Attlee-Truman agreement. We are satisfied that our national interests have been fully protected by these joint decision arrangements.

Having said this, I accept, of course, that your suggestions are made with the express intention of ensuring public confidence in the NATO twin-track decisions of December 1979. I agree with you that public confidence is extremely important and we shall

/ continue

*DR*  
*e. f. o*  
*co*  
*wfo*  
*mod*

continue to do whatever we can to increase confidence and to counter the harmful and totally inaccurate allegations that the British Government have no part in the decision-making process in relation to cruise missiles.

Finally, you ask for assurances that no decision should be taken on the deployment of the missiles without a debate in the House. In the debate we had in January 1980 we did, of course, secure the agreement of the House to the Government's policy on the role of nuclear weapons in our defence policy, when the NATO twin-track decision was fully considered. We stand by our policy, and I remain convinced that unless we proceed with the agreed plans to deploy cruise and Pershing II missiles there can be no real prospect of the total removal of the missiles that threaten us. But there will no doubt be opportunities for the House to discuss these issues before December of next year. For example, the Statement on the Defence Estimates is always debated, and you may put down amendments, as you did this year.

Yours sincerely

Raymond Storer

---

The Rt. Hon. Dr. David Owen, MP.



*Pls receive  
this page  
lw*

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

Thank you for your letter of 8 December about the Question you put to me in the House on 2 December.

*Satisfactory 3/2*

I have noted your comments on the question of a dual-key system for cruise missiles. In the absence of <sup>concrete</sup> results from the Geneva arms control negotiations, cruise missiles will be deployed in this country at the end of next year to bases which, as we have repeatedly made clear over the past three years, will be subject to the Attlee-Truman agreement reconfirmed by President Truman and Mr. Churchill and detailed in a communique in January 1952.

*?*

As you say, the Thor missile system, which was deployed here for five years from 1958 to 1963, was governed by a dual-key. ~~But this is not the only precedent.~~ From the point of view of control, there is no obvious distinction between weapons on missiles and those carried by aircraft. Apart from those ~~relating to Thor~~, the arrangements under successive governments - including the one in which you were Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary - have been those set out in the Attlee-Truman agreement. We are satisfied that our national interests have been fully protected by these joint decision arrangements.

Having said this, I accept, of course, that your suggestions are made with the express intention of ensuring public confidence in the NATO twin-track decisions of December 1979. I agree with you that public confidence is extremely important and we shall

*But there have of course been other systems  
different arrangements for other systems.*

/ continue



10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

17 December 1982

Thank you for your letter of 16 December, with which you enclosed a draft reply for the Prime Minister to send to Dr. David Owen about control of cruise missiles and the question of further Parliamentary debate.

I enclose a copy of the slightly revised version we will be putting to the Prime Minister over the weekend. If you have any comments, perhaps you could let me know by 1700 today.\*

I am copying this letter and its enclosure to Rober Bone (FCO), Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office) and David Heyhoe (Lord President's Office).

W. F. S. RICKETT

Derek Piper, Esq.,  
Ministry of Defence.



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1  
Telephone 01-~~XXXXXX~~ 218 6169

cc. Fco.  
no  
w/c office

D/S of S/PS/10

16th December 1982

*Pl type as amended*

*Wk  
17/12*

*Alan W. D. J. E.*

*ATC*

*I am not entirely happy with this. Perhaps we could discuss.*

*Wk*

*16/12*

You sent to me last Monday a copy of a letter the Prime Minister had received from Dr David Owen MP about control of cruise missiles and the question of further Parliamentary debate.

I enclose a draft reply for the Prime Minister to send, which has been approved by my Secretary of State.

I am copying this letter to John Holmes (FCO) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

*Yours ever*

*Andrew Lloyd*

(D T PIPER)

W F S Rickett Esq

Thank you for your letter of 8<sup>th</sup> December about the Question you put to me in the House on 2<sup>nd</sup> December.

*I have noted your comments on the question of a dual-key system for cruise missiles.*

[In my reply I made it clear that we had not sought any new or specific arrangements for the control of cruise missiles.] In the absence of concrete results from the Geneva arms control negotiations, cruise missiles will be deployed in this country at the end of next year to bases which, as we have repeatedly made clear over the past three years, will be subject to the Attlee-Truman agreement reconfirmed by President Truman and Mr Churchill and detailed in a communique in January 1952.

As you say, the Thor missile system, which was deployed here for 5 years from 1958 to 1963, was governed by a dual-key. But this is not the only precedent. From the point of view of control, there is no obvious distinction between weapons on missiles and those carried by aircraft. Apart from those relating to Thor the arrangements under successive Governments - including the one in which you were Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary - have been those set out in the Attlee-Truman agreement. [The arrangements we plan for cruise missile bases are the same as those with which you were satisfied in the case of bases for US aircraft.]

*Having said that,*

~~The whole question of control is certainly in our minds, as I am sure it was in those of previous Governments. We are, however, satisfied that our national interests have been fully protected by the joint decision arrangements.~~ While I note that you do not yourself rule out the idea of purchasing cruise missiles - and this would indeed be normal practice for dual control systems -

I have to say that the cost could be considerable. We had to decide whether limited defence funds were best spent in this way.

Having said this, I accept, of course, that your suggestions are made with the express intention of ensuring public confidence in the NATO twin-track decisions of December 1979. I agree with you that public confidence is extremely important and we shall continue to do whatever we can to increase confidence and to counter the harmful and totally inaccurate allegations that the British Government have no part in the decision-making process in relation to cruise missiles.

Finally, you ask for assurances that no decision should be taken on the deployment of the missiles without a debate in the House. In the debate we had in January 1980 we did, of course, secure the agreement of the House to the Government's policy on the role of nuclear weapons in our defence policy, when the NATO twin-track decision was fully considered. ~~As the Foreign Secretary made clear this week in Brussels, there is no question of reconsidering this policy decision.~~ *we stand by our policy, and,* We would, however, much prefer it if the Soviet Union were to agree to the United States' proposals on the zero option which we have supported all along. That would remove the threat we face from the Soviet Union's intermediate-range nuclear forces, and our own deployments would not then have to take place. I still hope, therefore, that the Russians will come to realise why, from the viewpoint of our own safety, the West simply cannot accept an imbalance between us of intermediate-range nuclear forces. <sup>PL</sup> I remain convinced that unless we proceed with the agreed plans to deploy cruise and Pershing II missiles there can be no real prospects ~~for either the total removal of the missiles that threaten us, or some other satisfactory balance which falls short of this ideal.~~

*But there will no doubt be opportunities for the House to discuss these issues before December<sup>2</sup> of next year. For example,*

the statement on the Defense Estimates is always debated,  
and you may put down amendments, as you did this year.



010

Covering TOP SECRET

2

Copy No 1 of 5



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1  
Telephone 01-~~930 3022~~ 218 6169

MO 18/1/1

15th December 1982

Prime Minister

A.F.C. 15/12

h.a.  
16/12

Dear Tom,

In your letter of yesterday you asked for a rather fuller note than we had prepared before on the arrangements for joint decision on the use in an emergency by the United States of UK bases. I enclose such a note, covered by some additional speaking notes.

So far as the reply to Dr Owen's letter to the Prime Minister is concerned, my Secretary of State will be looking at this overnight and we hope to let you have a draft tomorrow morning.

A copy of this letter and enclosures goes to Brian Fall (Foreign and Commonwealth Office)

Yours ever

Alexander

(D T PIPER)

A J Coles Esq

Covering TOP SECRET

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1

TELEPHONE 01-335 3000



5 DEC 1982



## CONTROL OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

1. WHAT ARE THE PRECISE TERMS OF THE AGREEMENT BY WHICH THE US USES BASES IN THE UK?

The communique issued after the discussion between Mr Churchill and Mr Truman in January 1952 confirmed arrangements reached earlier between Mr Attlee and Mr Truman, in the following terms: "Under arrangements made for the common defence, the United States has the use of certain bases in the United Kingdom. We reaffirm the understanding that the use of these bases in an emergency would be a matter for joint decision by HM Government and the United States Government in the light of the circumstances at the time."

2. HOW DOES "JOINT DECISION" OPERATE?

The House would not expect me to go into details.  
/If pressed/ This is a long-standing, well understood arrangement between US Presidents and Prime Ministers.

3. WILL THE GLCMs HAVE A DUAL-KEY?

No. The weapon will be owned and manned entirely by the United States.

4. COULD WE NOT HAVE HAD  
A DUAL-KEY ARRANGEMENT?

A dual-key arrangement could entail the UK's purchasing the missiles and supporting equipment (except war-  
heads) and manning them in the same  
way as we do for our Lance missiles  
in Germany.

5. ARRANGEMENTS WHICH  
APPLIED TO THOR SHOULD  
APPLY TO CRUISE

Thor missiles, which were based in the UK for only 5 years (from 1958-63), are the only US nuclear missile system ever based in the UK to be governed by a true dual-key. Our national interests are fully protected by the joint decision arrangements which have applied to other US nuclear forces based in the UK for many years.



MR RICKETT  
AM  
14/12

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

14 December 1982

Arrangements for Joint Decision on the Use by the U.S.  
of UK Bases in an Emergency

Your Department supplied some briefing on this question for use by the Prime Minister at Question time today. In the event, the Prime Minister did not make use of it.

Mrs Thatcher would now be grateful for a fuller note on the arrangements for joint decision. I should be grateful if you could let me have the basic texts and any comments you wish to offer on their meaning.

It would be helpful if this could reach me by tomorrow night since the matter could be raised at Question time on Thursday.

I am copying this letter to Brian Fall (Foreign and Commonwealth Office).

A. J. COLES

Richard Mottram, Esq.,  
Ministry of Defence.

From: The Rt Hon Dr David Owen MP

cc BI  
AJL  
cc BFau(fco)



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

8 December 1982

Prime Minister  
worth reading in full. I have  
asked my NOK's office for  
a line to take.

wh  
13/12

The Rt Hon Mrs Margaret Thatcher MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London SW1

mt

Dear Prime Minister.

Following my Question to you in the House of Commons on 2 December during Prime Minister's Questions, you stated that if Cruise missiles were to be stationed here the same rules would apply to them as have governed American nuclear weapons here for many years. As the Question I posed specifically related to Thor missiles I would be grateful to receive clarification and confirmation that a similar system will be adopted for Cruise missiles if they have to be deployed in this country.

The agreement reached between Harold Macmillan and President Eisenhower over the installation of Thor IRBMs is set out in Cmnd 406. It provides for a 'dual-key' system, whereby the missiles and warheads were provided by the United States and the sites and supporting facilities by Britain under an arrangement where an American key activated the warheads and a British key launched the missile. The Agreement states:

"The decision to launch these missiles will be a matter for joint decision by the two Governments. Any such joint decision will be made in the light of the circumstances at the time and having regard to the undertaking the two Governments have assumed in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty."

The role of Thor missiles as a deterrent was restricted to general NATO purposes approved by both Britain and the United States. I believe it is essential that Britain has a similar veto power over the use of Cruise missiles should they be deployed here. If the US insist that we should purchase the Cruise missiles, as we did for Thor, then I believe this is a price worth paying - preferably to be a charge on NATO as a whole but if it had to be only Britain I believe this would be acceptable.

As you know Lance short range missiles which are deployed by NATO in Europe have an electronically controlled dual key arrangement activated by American and West European officers. So in fact, if the same rules were to apply as govern American missiles with nuclear weapons, in the past and at present, then Cruise missiles, were they to be deployed, would have to have a physical mechanism not just a political mechanism, whereby a British Government controlled the safety catch. I think you would find

/...



that it would be easier to stand by the NATO dual-track decision during the negotiations in 1983 in INF if the British public had total confidence in the capacity of the British Government to determine whether or not Cruise missiles were ever to be launched from British territory, if they had to be deployed.

You also did not give the assurance I asked, that no decision would be taken on the deployment of Cruise without a debate in the House of Commons. I believe it is essential that before any nuclear weapons, as distinct from launchers or even perhaps missiles, were to be transferred to the UK, Parliament should decide in principle whether or not to deploy. The German Defence Minister has already made it clear that any decision on deployment of Cruise, as a result of the outcome of the INF negotiations, will be taken in Bonn, not in Washington and again I think the British public have a right to know that it will be Parliament who will make their own independent assessment about the negotiating position adopted by the Soviet Union and the United States respectively in the INF talks.

The views that I have on this have received quite considerable public support already and I enclose for your interest a copy of an editorial which appeared in the Daily Telegraph last week.

In view of our exchange on the floor of the House on 2 December I am giving a copy of this letter to the press.

Yours sincerely  
David Owen

David Owen

# THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 2, 1982

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## NATO'S NEW WILL

THE SO-CALLED NATO "twin-track" policy of deploying a new generation of intermediate-range nuclear missiles by the end of 1983 unless the Soviet Union has begun to dismantle its corresponding SS-20s is looking in reasonable shape. A year ago, the same could not have been said. Ill-advised and insensitive remarks by American officials, including President REAGAN himself, about the possibility of being able to limit a nuclear engagement to the European theatre had given the Soviet Union and the self-styled peace movement a heaven-sent propaganda advantage. At the same time, Chancellor SCHMIDT was facing increasing criticism from his own party over his personal commitment to take the Cruise and Pershing II missiles on West German soil, while the coalition government in Holland was divided and fearful of defeat over the issue.

Since then, President REAGAN has succeeded in allaying some, but by no means all, European fears with his zero option initiative (which would mean the withdrawal of all intermediate range nuclear forces by both sides) and an apparently sincere promise of a constructive approach to negotiations with the Russians in Geneva. The political scene in Europe has also changed with governments of the centre-right, both firmly committed to the twin-track policy, taking over in Holland and Germany. The robust reaction from Nato's Nuclear Planning Group to a particularly crude piece of Soviet bullying this week was a satisfying confirmation of the new mood.

It is to be fervently hoped that Nato's new determination will be maintained. It would be a disaster for the Alliance if deployment were to be abandoned or in any way postponed unless the Soviet Union succumbs to a most improbable change of heart. That said, the question of deployment of our medium range missiles has been handled with almost as much ineptitude as the neutron bomb fiasco which preceded it. There are times when it seems that Nato's greatest talent is for shooting itself in the foot. One gesture which might at this stage win over more of the doubters would be for the Americans to offer each country which is to take the new missiles control over one of the safety catches. Up to now, this has been conditional on the host nation purchasing the missile (though not the warhead). As Dr DAVID OWEN has argued, national self respect means that people must feel that it is their government which can stop their territory being used to trigger nuclear war.



**Mr. Peter Walker:** The Government have already made good progress in improving the operation of the common agricultural policy. The agricultural share of the Community budget has dropped from 80 per cent. when we took office to around 60 per cent. this year. We are determined to keep up our efforts for as long as necessary.

**Mr. Proctor:** Is it not fair to say that the fundamental reform of the common agricultural policy is pure illusion?

**Mr. Walker:** My hon. Friend should reflect upon the fact that over the past year British food prices have increased by less than 5 per cent., our exports have increased by £600 million in the past four years and our imports are £1,000 million down. He should recognise that Britain is now obtaining considerable benefit from the changes that we have achieved in the common agricultural policy.

**Mr. Deakins:** Will the Minister confirm that he has no intention of seeking any fundamental reforms in the common agricultural policy which would reduce the price of commodities to the British housewife?

**Mr. Walker:** I repeat that under the Labour Government food prices went up by 122 per cent. Under this Government they have gone up by only 32 per cent. as a result of our handling of the common agricultural policy. The view of the Minister of Agriculture in that Labour Government was that the majority of price increases were due to factors outside the Common Market. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman reflects carefully on that.

**Mr. Colin Shepherd:** Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that in any reshaping or adjustment of the common agricultural policy he will not lose sight of the importance of the continuity of food supplies? That has gone largely unremarked during our membership of the Community, but it is valuable to the consumer.

**Mr. Walker:** Yes, Sir. In the 1930s we made the mistake of relying on world markets, and great sections of British agriculture and horticulture were destroyed. After the outbreak of war we recognised the terrible failure of that policy. I am pleased to say that under all post-war Governments adequate food supplies have been ensured, and under this Government our self-sufficiency in the goods that we can produce has increased from 67 to 75 per cent.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Engagements

**Q1. Mr. Duffy** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 2 December.

**The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher):** This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

**Mr. Duffy:** Has the Prime Minister noticed that Britain now imports more manufactured goods than it exports? If she thinks that her policy of industrial anorexia is not contributing to that deindustrialisation and to today's horrifying unemployment figures, how does she explain that the crucial factor in this week's savage job cuts in the

Sheffield steel industry was not her pet alibi of poor quality, productivity or delivery, but a lack of domestic demand, notably in engineering steel?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman must have made a mistake in his reference to imports in manufactured goods being more than exports. The monthly figures give imports as cost, insurance and freight, and they give exports as free on board. If one excludes cost, insurance and freight—which come in invisibles—a proper comparison of imports with exports can be made, and if that is done the hon. Gentleman will find that what he said is not so. There is still a surplus of manufacturing exports over imports. The hon. Gentleman has made a common mistake.

The unemployment figures are out today, and unfortunately the underlying trend is upwards. However, there is a deep world recession, which is affecting other countries in Europe and, of course, our industrial competitors further afield.

The hon. Gentleman implied that we need not take any notice of quality and productivity. Of course we must want quality—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Gentleman suggested that he did not want another homily on quality and productivity, but both are vital. The hon. Gentleman went on to speak about demand. I point out once again that the import penetration of cars is above 55 per cent. If those cars were made here, we should have the steel trade here. That also applies to many machine tools. The problem is not a shortage of demand, but the fact that people choose to buy foreign goods instead of those produced here.

**Sir Paul Bryan:** As the Government are about to come to a decision on overseas students' fees, will my right hon. Friend find time today to press the appropriate Ministers to accept the offer of the Hong Kong Government to share with this Government the cost of giving home student status to Hong Kong students?

**The Prime Minister:** I understand that a scheme has been proposed by the Hong Kong Government, the cost of which would be shared fifty-fifty with this Government, and we are considering it.

**Dr. Owen:** In view of today's NATO Defence Ministers meeting, the considerable public disquiet about cruise missiles and the regrettable position that might arise in December next year if there is no progress at the INF and START talks, will the Prime Minister assure the House that if it were necessary to deploy cruise missiles a system would be adopted similar to that adopted for the Thor missiles, whereby they could never be fired without the physical agreement of representatives of the British Government? Will the Prime Minister assure the House that no decision will be taken in December 1983 on their deployment without a debate in the House?

**The Prime Minister:** We are already pledged to honour the NATO commitment, and I do not believe that the right hon. Gentleman would wish us to go back on that. He wishes that there were no need to have cruise missiles stationed here. There would indeed be no such need if the Russians dismantled their SS20 systems. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman wishes that as much as we do. Should cruise missiles be stationed here—they will have to be unless the SS20 systems are taken down—the same rules will apply to them as have governed American nuclear weapons here for many years.



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