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PM/79/45PRIME MINISTERComprehensive Test Ban Negotiations

1. We are due to discuss this subject on 24 May.
2. Taking the issues which most affect UK interests, I understand that the Ministry of Defence regard the verification measures under negotiation, including National Seismic Stations in the Soviet Union, as adequate for a test ban lasting 3 years. It also seems clear that the British and American nuclear stockpiles are unlikely to encounter serious problems because of such a treaty. All the options about what should happen after 3 years remain open. The US, UK and Soviet Union will each have a veto on the extension of the treaty. It is moreover very possible that the Russians will not want extension. Their position is that this decision should take account of whether China (and France) is still testing, and China is extremely unlikely to give up testing in 3 years.
3. I suggest, therefore, that the treaty under negotiation presents no significant security risks (subject to our receiving adequate assurances on stockpile testing and on "decoupling" from the American experts whose visit Mr Vance suggested to you today). And it may present advantages, especially in non-proliferation. About a dozen states, some of them highly unreliable, have not signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty and are capable of developing nuclear weapons. They include Pakistan, now working on a nuclear weapons programme; India, which has conducted one nuclear explosion; South Africa, Israel and Brazil. If any of these acquired nuclear weapons, its potential rivals would want to follow suit. With widening proliferation the world would become a much more dangerous place. A CTB could help prevent this. There is a possibility of persuading some of these near-nuclear powers to renounce nuclear explosions by adhering to it, since a CTB Treaty can be presented as less discriminatory than the Non-Proliferation Treaty. More generally, the non-aligned are complaining increasingly that, if they are to renounce nuclear weapons, the nuclear powers must make progress towards nuclear

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disarmament. In this context, they have called above all for a CTB, which is also supported by our NATO allies except France. Satisfying the widespread hope for a CTB would strengthen our hand in arguing for further measures to help prevent nuclear weapons proliferation.

4. A CTB would also be the kind of practical advance in East-West relations which I believe the Government should promote. British participation in the negotiations accords with our position as a nuclear weapons state and with the active support which successive British Governments have given to specific measures of arms control. It was of course Mr Macmillan who played the key role in the Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963.

5. I also believe that a British move to withdraw from the negotiations, which have been going for nearly 2 years, would have widespread political consequences. These would include serious difficulties with the Americans, which could affect our crucially important nuclear relationship with them. Apart from the fact that US participation in a CTB Treaty would also deny us the use of American testing facilities, our withdrawal from the negotiations would be a propaganda gift to the Russians, and many other governments would be dismayed.

6. My view, on these grounds, is that the UK should continue to play a positive role in the CTB negotiations and should not seek to change the concept of the treaty under negotiation.

7. On 24 May we are also due to consider the specific issue of National Seismic Stations (NSS) in the UK and dependent territories, on which officials have prepared a paper. I had^a preliminary word about this with Mr Vance on 21 May. I told him that I thought it would be very difficult for the Government to justify the acceptance of costly seismic monitoring stations to check that the UK is not engaged in an activity - nuclear testing - for which we ourselves have no facilities. Mr Vance expressed understanding for our difficulties but said he thought it would nevertheless be essential for the UK to accept more than 5 NSS. I tried on him the alternative idea of British withdrawal from the tripartite Separate Verification Agreement. He clearly did not favour this. Although I mentioned the cost of NSS several times, he did not take the cue to mention

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any possibility of American financial help.

8. The existing British position on NSS has created an impasse in the negotiations. It will have to be changed one way or the other. The acceptance of, say, 6 NSS would probably unblock the negotiations but would be costly and difficult to justify against the background of public expenditure cuts or indeed in terms of common sense. If my colleagues share this view, the alternative would be to consider British withdrawal from the Separate Verification Agreement. But this would be a difficult option if the Americans were strongly opposed to it, for instance on the grounds that it would prejudice the chances of securing NSS in the Soviet Union. Rather than trying on 24 May to reach a final decision, I suggest that we could decide to explore urgently and in detail US views on the implications of British withdrawal from the Separate Verification Agreement. We might also discuss on 24 May whether to ask the Americans more directly about financial help over NSS on British territory, although this would not remove the political difficulties.

9. I am sending copies of this minute to the Defence Secretary, the Home Secretary and the Secretary to the Cabinet.


(CARRINGTON)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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