



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

21 December 1982

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J.P.  
*Ian H. 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

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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

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