



MO 8

PRIME MINISTERHOUSE OF COMMONS DEFENCE COMMITTEE:
ENQUIRY INTO SUCCESSOR SYSTEMS

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

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

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



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

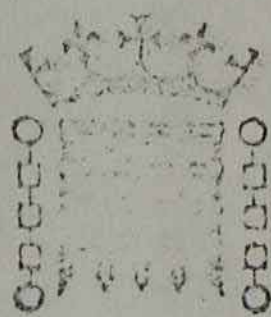
I consider that I should seek to play this long, and to avoid - or at least postpone for as long as possible - any open breach with the Committee. I can try to persuade the Committee informally to take evidence from non-official witnesses first, and to start with their visits with Faslane and Rosyth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

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

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

Ministry of Defence

9th May 1980



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

DA 14

Inquiry on Strategic Nuclear Weapons Policy

Notes by the Clerk to the Committee

1. Terms of Reference:

The terms of reference are:

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

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

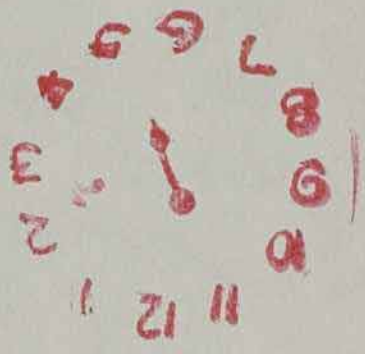
(Agreed to by the Committee on 12th March)

2. Alternative Forms of Replacement

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

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

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



9 MAY 1980