

SECRET

15

Defence

Ref. A0253

PRIME MINISTER

MISC 7: Long-range Theatre Nuclear Forces

BACKGROUND

The subject was last discussed at MISC 7 on 10th July in order to give guidance to the Secretary of State for Defence for his discussions in Washington with Dr. Brown. In his minute to you dated 17th September, Mr. Pym now reports on the present state of play and recommends that a decision should be taken in principle about the proposed basing in the United Kingdom of the United States-owned Ground Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCM). Your colleagues were generally favourable to this idea at the earlier discussion.

HANDLING

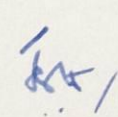
2. You will wish to invite the Secretary of State for Defence to introduce his paper. The points to be covered in subsequent discussion are:-
 - (a) The decision to accept basing of United States GLCMs -
 - (i) Is the cost acceptable? It is not large.
 - (ii) How will British public opinion react? Overcoming safety fears will need a major public relations effort.
 - (iii) How should we secure maximum credit for our decision, both with the Americans and with our other Allies?
 - (b) The recommendation not to decide yet on whether to acquire in addition any GLCMs of our own (as replacement for our Vulcan bombers):
 - (i) Important to note that we should have difficulty providing our own warheads. Mr. Pym's minute about the Nuclear Weapons Programme and the troubles at Aldermaston, also dated 17th September, is relevant; but it is not on the agenda, and discussion of what to do about Aldermaston would be inappropriate in this forum since that is primarily a matter of Civil Service management which needs further examination.

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- (ii) As Mr. Pym says, the issue of United Kingdom-owned GLCMs should be considered at the same time as Ministers decide on a replacement for Polaris, i. e. probably in early November. But it may not be in our interest to recognise too openly that the two issues are linked. We do not want United States pressure over British LRTNF as a corollary of United States co-operation over a Polaris successor.
- (iii) Need to be clear about the distinction between LRTNF modernisation, which is needed for the '80s, and Polaris replacement which is needed for the '90s and beyond. In deployment to NATO Polaris does have a useful theatre role, but its essential purpose is strategic - to act as our ultimate national deterrent. The same will go for its successor.
- (c) An arms control package -
 - (i) As Mr. Pym notes, this will be needed for political reasons within the Alliance but must not be allowed to delay or get ahead of the modernisation programme. Lord Carrington's minute of 6th July, which MISC 7 endorsed on 10th July, outlined a way through the minefield.
 - (ii) You will wish to be guided by this, and any later developments, at your meeting with Chancellor Schmidt on 31st October.

CONCLUSION

- 3. Subject to the points made in discussion, the Committee might be guided -
 - (i) To note the position set out in Mr. Pym's minute.
 - (ii) To agree in principle to accept the basing of United States-owned GLCMs in the United Kingdom.
 - (iii) To await Mr. Pym's proposals on the timing and method of presenting such a decision after discussion with the United States.
 - (iv) To note that Mr. Pym may be making proposals in due course about the acquisition of a new United Kingdom-owned LRTNF system which may be linked with a decision on our successor to Polaris.
 - (v) To note the arms control problem.


JOHN HUNT

18th September, 1979