

Reference A0154

MISS STEPHENS

P.A.

As requested, I attach a brief (prepared by Richard Hastie-Smith in the Defence Secretariat) for the use of the Prime Minister at her meeting with Lord Zuckerman on Thursday, 23rd August.

Stephen Whittle

S. F. J. Whittle

Assistant Private Secretary

16th August 1979



Reference: 1012

MISS STEPHENS

As requested, I have a white envelope for
Richard Harris-Smith in the Distance Department
for the use of that office. The envelope is
with Miss Stephens on 1012-1013.

16 AUG 1979



John A. Stephens

Meeting with Lord Zuckerman - 23 August

1. In his letter to the Prime Minister dated 27 July in which Lord Mountbatten suggested that this meeting should take place, "a serious briefing on the true nuclear situation" was the object of the exercise. Lord Zuckerman's official contacts with nuclear matters are a good deal less close than they used to be, and it is difficult to tell precisely what ground he intends to cover on this occasion.

2. The main elements of our current nuclear defence policy are as follows -

a. Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

Negotiations in Geneva are at present in recess. When they resume towards the end of September they are still likely to be deadlocked on the Russian proposal that the United Kingdom should accept ten National Seismic Stations on British territory. Lord Zuckerman is a member of the Nuclear Advisory Panel which recently provided answers to questions related to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty concerning the maintenance of nuclear weapon stockpile reliability without tests, and the possibility of failure in verifying compliance with a CTB treaty. Sir John Hunt sent their reply to the Prime Minister under cover of a minute dated 13 July. This is almost certainly a matter which Lord Zuckerman will wish to raise with the Prime Minister since he is a keen advocate of a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and it apparently took a good deal of persuasion to obtain his agreement to the panel's somewhat sceptical response to the questions put to them.

b. Strategic Arms Limitation Talks

The immediate United Kingdom concern in the current ratification of the SALT II Treaty relates to the interpretation which is put on the non-circumvention clause. The actual process of ratification seems to be proceeding reasonably smoothly and the United States Government plainly regard it as the most important element in their current relations with the USSR. If it is ratified, the next stage in SALT will relate to

Theatre Nuclear Forces. We are at present developing general lines of agreement with our allies which should both meet their domestic concerns and allow decisions on the modification of NATO Theatre Nuclear Forces to be taken by the end of this year. We wish to obtain the exclusion from SALT III of British systems, and concentrate on systems of greatest concern to us, in particular SS-20.

c. Modernisation of Theatre Nuclear Forces

This is a matter of high importance to NATO defence with a political significance which reaches beyond strict defence considerations. It is now a key test of NATO's collective will to ensure its security. The United States has put forward proposals to its European allies of which the main elements are the replacement of the Pershing I's in West Germany by Pershing II's and the deployment of Ground Launched Cruise Missiles on the territory of the European NATO allies. Excluding Polaris the main United Kingdom contribution to NATO Long Range Theatre Nuclear Forces at present is the force of 55 United Kingdom Vulcans which cannot be kept in service beyond 1982/83. The Tornado which replaces it has a significantly shorter range. It is the aim of the United States to seek to persuade its European allies to reach a decision on plans for the modernisation of Theatre Nuclear Forces by the end of this year and this timetable fits in with the United Kingdom's own defence requirements.

d. A Successor to Polaris

The four United Kingdom Polaris submarines will have to be taken out of service by the mid 1990s. Exploratory work is already being carried out at official level with the United States. Among possible candidates are a system based on the American Trident C4 missile or an improved version of the existing A3 missile with which our Polaris boats are armed at present which are already being improved by the interim Chevaline programme. Although a decision on a Polaris successor is less urgent both for NATO and national reasons than the modernisation of our other Long Range Theatre Nuclear Forces, it may well prove desirable for us to take a decision on principle on this issue in the same timescale as that for the Theatre Nuclear Forces because of the inter-relationship of the two decisions in regard to their demands on the available technical resources, their impact on the defence budget and their effect on the size and shape of our forces generally.

3. Although it is highly probable that Lord Zuckerman will wish to put forward his own views on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, he can also be expected to voice his fears about Theatre Nuclear Forces. He has long held the view that the military command and control arrangements for tactical and theatre nuclear weapons are inadequate in relation to the risk they represent. He believes that despite stringent nuclear release procedures, a hard pressed military commander fighting a conventional battle will resort too readily to the use of any nuclear weapons that are available to him. But against this must be set the view that current NATO strategy is based on having such a range of capabilities, including Theatre Nuclear Forces that the USSR can never be confident of overcoming NATO at one level without triggering a response at a higher level, leading ultimately if it persisted to full scale nuclear war. This latter risk becomes greater if the intermediate options do not exist.

4. Finally Lord Zuckerman may wish to refer to his special relationship with Admiral Rickover. This is still important. Although Admiral Rickover is nearly 80, he is a legendary figure, still working full time in the Department of Energy and exercising enormous influence over all our defence nuclear relations with the United States. A recent example of this, stemming from the Three Mile Island nuclear mishap, was a request from him to us for a report on a fire which took place in one of our Fleet submarines, HMS Warspite in 1976 which had nuclear implications. A report is being prepared to send to Admiral Rickover on this accident.