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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

TELEPHONE 01-218 9000  
DIRECT DIALLING 01-218 2111/3

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MO 13/1/34

PRIME MINISTER

LONG-RANGE THEATRE NUCLEAR FORCES

This minute summarises the position reached on long-range theatre nuclear forces (LRNTF), and recommends a decision in principle on one aspect - the proposed basing in the United Kingdom of United States-owned ground launched cruise missiles (GLCM).

2. You will recall from the paper attached to my minute of 5th July the general case that NATO needs a major new effort in LRTNF. The United States have now proposed to station in five European countries (United Kingdom, Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands) a total of 572 long-range missiles. These would comprise 108 Pershing II ballistic missiles in the FRG, replacing 108 of the present shorter-range Pershing I; and 464 GLCM spread among the five countries. Deployment would begin about the end of 1983. The element proposed to go in the UK is 144 GLCM.
3. All these systems would be owned and operated by the US, unless the UK wished to take on some of the 144. (As Washington telegram No 2346 of 17th August shows, the US want us in any event, separately from the "572" programme, to replace our Vulcans with new long-range systems). Aside from any UK-owned systems, the US would meet the costs, except that they would want related installations to be financed from NATO common infrastructure funds and would hope that host countries would provide some security guards.
4. Discussions have been proceeding in NATO without commitment. The scheme has President Carter's full backing.

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All the four Continental host countries seem cautiously positive, but face varying degrees of political difficulty - for example, the Netherlands have particularly awkward public and Parliamentary opinion to manage, and the FRG say they cannot be the only Continental host. There is general agreement on the desirability of agreed collective decisions in December, and countries will be increasingly under pressure during the autumn, notably at the mid-November meeting of the Nuclear Planning Group, to make their positions clear.

5. Alongside work on a programme for new LRTNF systems NATO is considering what public proposal might be made to the Soviet Union about arms control in this field. Such a proposal is regarded as essential by our Continental Allies if an LRTNF programme is to have any chance of domestic political acceptance. Our own objectives have been to avoid any proposal which made the LRTNF programme a hostage to negotiations with the Soviet Union; to ensure that NATO did not make a proposal disadvantageous in itself; and to keep any UK-owned systems out. Work so far suggests that these objectives are being adequately met. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary will no doubt report when matters are further advanced.

6. I am moderately optimistic that NATO can be ready to reach decisions in December, but this will need care and is far from assured.

7. We shall need to decide what we ourselves should do about LRTNF. I regard it as out of the question that we should do nothing. As my note of 5th July brought out, the real choice is whether to accept the proposed UK basing of US missiles only; or whether to do anything on our own account as well. We do not have to settle the two aspects together.

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8. I believe that we could decide in principle to accept US basing, and that it would be helpful to the Alliance to take this decision now. There will be various details, including precise locations, to settle. A new deployment would attract public notice, and there would be criticism from various quarters like the CND; but I believe such difficulties are surmountable. A brief note on implications is attached. If we take the decision of principle, I would consult the US on how this could be most helpfully timed and presented in the Alliance context, and would then make proposals to my colleagues about future handling.

9. The costs to us of US basing cannot yet be calculated exactly, but they would be modest. Even if, which is not certain, the installation cost of the whole "572" programme became a net addition to the NATO common infrastructure programme, our share would only be an estimated £15m. Depending on detailed deployment, up to £55m would be spent in the UK.

10. The question of a new UK-owned force to maintain our "sub-strategic" long-range capability is much more complex. I see attraction in acquiring such a force; but difficult questions of resource priority arise, particularly in regard to the provision of UK nuclear warheads, which I would regard as essential in the long run if any such force were to be really worthwhile. I have drawn the attention of my colleagues in a separate minute to the grave problems we face at Aldermaston. More work needs to be done before I can formulate adequately based recommendations, which we could best consider when we address the question of a strategic successor to Polaris. I shall bring a report forward at that stage.

11. In brief, I invite my colleagues

a. to note the position reached in NATO  
(paragraphs 2-6);

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b. to agree that we should decide in principle to accept the basings of <sup>US</sup> UK-owned GLCMs in the UK, and that I should make proposals on the timing and method of presenting such a decision after discussion with the US (paragraphs 8-9);

c. to note that I will put forward recommendations on any acquisition of new UK-owned LRTN systems at the same time as we consider a replacement for our strategic force (paragraph 10).

12. I am sending copies of this minute to our colleagues on MISC 7, and to Sir John Hunt.

17th September 1979

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ANNEX TO  
MO 13/1/34  
DATED: 17.9.79

IMPLICATIONS OF BASING US GLCMs IN THE UK

The Proposals

The US have proposed that 144 GLCMs should be based in the UK as part of a total deployment of 464 GLCMs in Europe. The force would be organised in flights of 16 missiles; each flight would comprise four mobile Transporter-Erector-Launchers (TEL) (sketch at Appendix) each capable of carrying and launching four missiles; two mobile Launch Control Centres (LCC); and about 12 support vehicles. The force would probably be based at existing USAF airfields, as Main Operating Bases (MOB). On the MOB, the four TELs and two LCCs at each flight would be stored in new specially-hardened shelters giving a high degree of survivability against pre-emptive conventional attack. The missiles would normally be kept in pressurised containers in the TEL firing tubes fuelled and with warheads attached. One or two flights would be permanently on Quick Reaction Alert at 10 minutes' notice to fire.

2. Since the shelters would not provide sufficient protection from nuclear attack, the US envisage that in time of tension or war the force would deploy in flights to pre-planned covert sites within 150 kms from the MOB, moving from site to site about every six hours under extreme threat conditions. They would want to practise off-base deployment in peacetime (but without warheads).

3. Some 400 US personnel would operate and maintain a 144-GLCM force; a further 550 would be required for security protection, and the UK would be asked to provide 160 of these. It is envisaged that the cost of new facilities (such as shelters and maintenance buildings) required for basing the new TNF systems in Europe should be borne on the NATO Infrastructure budget (partly so as to involve all NATO countries in the programme). There might be other support facilities not qualifying for NATO funding, but the cost would be small.

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Implications

4. The main points of initial staff appraisal of the US basing concept are as follows:

a. Airfields are clearly the best choice for MOB, since they can readily provide the land and some of the installations and accommodation required. It is also important to be able to move the warheads and weapons to and from the US by air, avoiding public roads and ports.

b. Off-base dispersal in wartime should be feasible (Emergency Powers would allow the use of private land) but for covert pre-surveying of sites in peacetime we would need to have control of US movements. Choice of covert sites avoiding conflict with other military activities might be difficult. MOD training lands could be used for practising off-base deployment in peacetime, though there would have to be some movement on public roads.

c. While the storage of four missiles and warheads in each TEL should not present an unacceptable safety hazard, the US plan for holding 16 warheads (ie one flight) in one shelter could contravene our current nuclear safety rules. The Nuclear Weapons Safety Committee (which includes members from outside the Ministry of Defence) will advise on these issues when more detailed information is received from the US, but preliminary examination suggests that with some modification to the other shelter lay-out, or by reducing numbers of missiles in TELs, the problem is manageable.

d. The UK's share of the addition to the NATO facilities in the Infrastructure budget would be about £15M. Depending on the pattern of deployment up to about £55M would be spent in the UK.

e. The provision of 160 UK personnel for security duties, if desired, should not be an insuperable problem; the cost would be about £1M a year.

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f. Public opinion on the deployment of these new systems would have to be carefully prepared, although US nuclear weapons have been stored in the UK for many years (Thor medium-range ballistic missiles were based here in the early 1960). Some sectors of opinion are bound to be hostile. The GLCMs should not be visible on their MOBs, but practising off-base dispersal would clearly be conspicuous. We might have to consider breaking with our policy of refusing to confirm or deny the whereabouts of nuclear weapons if we are to assure the public that warheads will not be deployed off-base for training.

g. It would be necessary to ensure that the new force was brought within the ambit of existing understandings about US consultation with HMG over any use of US nuclear forces based in the UK.

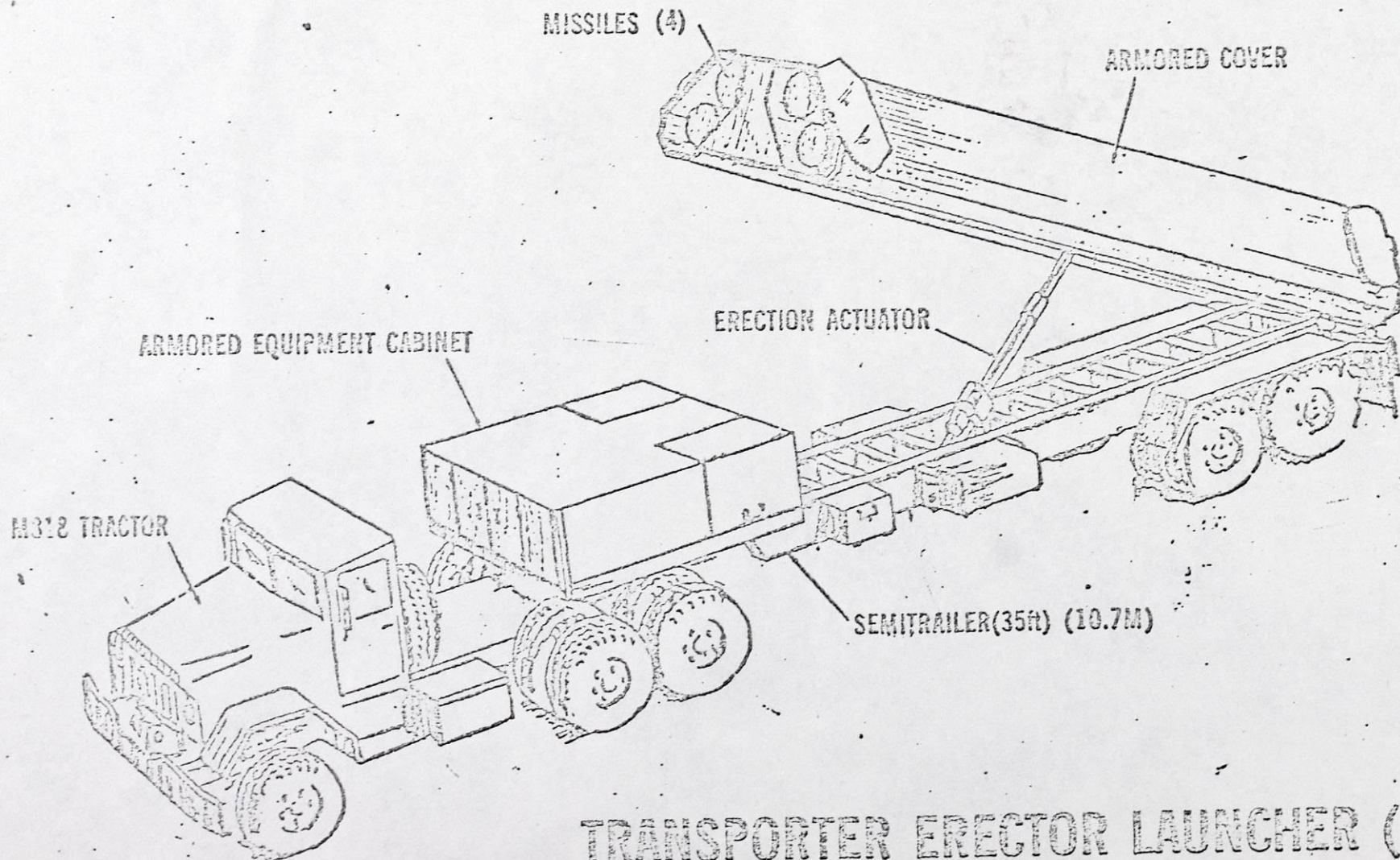
5. Detailed points in these various respects need further information and study by the Ministry of Defence and other Departments concerned.

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MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1  
Telephone 01-~~500 7000~~ 218 2111/3

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MO 13/1/34

18th September 1979

*Dear Michael,*

LONG RANGE THEATRE NUCLEAR FORCES

I regret to say that an error inadvertently appeared in paragraph 11b of the Defence Secretary's minute to the Prime Minister of 17th September concerning Long Range Theatre Nuclear Forces. The second line of that sub-paragraph should say "the basing of US-owned GLCMs" not "the basing of UK-owned GLCMs".

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to other members of MISC 7 and to Barry Hilton (Cabinet Office).

*Yours sincerely,*

*John Gutteridge*

(J D GUTTERIDGE)

M O'D B Alexander Esq  
10 Downing Street

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HEADQUARTERS  
WHITE HALL LONDON SW1



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