

Defence

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Ref. A09932

PRIME MINISTER

Long Range Theatre Nuclear Forces and Theatre Nuclear Arms Control

(MISC 7)

These two papers by the Secretary of State for Defence (MO 13/1/34 of 5th July) and by the Foreign Secretary deal with different aspects of an important and difficult subject. Although neither paper seeks decisions now the outcome of the discussion will be important to Mr. Pym for his visit to Washington on 16th-18th July. He will clearly need to be able to give an initial impression of our present thinking on how we intend to modernise the long-range theatre nuclear forces which we contribute to NATO, and on how we think our plans should be reconciled with forthcoming arms control negotiations i. e. SALT III. I have underlined "theatre" because we are not here talking about the next generation of our strategic nuclear deterrent i. e. the succession to Polaris in its national and strategic role. We are talking about the succession to the longer-range nuclear weapons we have hitherto deployed in a theatre role in the North Atlantic area; not the short-range tactical weapons (Honest John, etc., currently being replaced by Lance) but the medium-range weapons we contribute to the Alliance viz. (a) the V-bombers carrying nuclear bombs and (b) Polaris in its non-strategic and non-national role. The confusing fact that Polaris has two roles should not be allowed to mislead the meeting into trying to discuss the strategic future as well. That will come soon, but separately.

HANDLING

2. Although the two papers are linked you may like to ask the Secretary of State for Defence to speak first and to concentrate on the options in paragraph 13 of the memorandum attached to his minute. There would be value in a first exchange of views on the following points:

- (a) Is it clear that we need new plans (i. e. new hardware decisions) of some kind? If no change is made in existing plans, the Vulcan bombers will phase out after 1983 and the United Kingdom nuclear contribution will then

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consist of the ageing Polaris force, the relatively short ranged Tornado and our provision of bases for United States F 111s. Mr. Pym convincingly dismisses this option.

(b) Should we do no more than agree to new United States systems being based in the United Kingdom? Present indications are that the Americans would like the United Kingdom to provide Ground Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCMs) in their TNF modernisation programme. A cheap way of doing this would be to accept United States-owned GLCMs in this country. If the United States so wish, we might even offer to man and operate the systems for them although they should provide warhead custodians. But this would not be regarded as a truly national contribution; and there could be political problems in the apparent surrender of a national sovereignty involved.

(c) Should we acquire from the Americans a United Kingdom system with United States warheads?

This is an arrangement which has worked in the past with our tactical nuclear weapons in Germany. But at that time we still had the V bombers as well. Once they are gone, public opinion may be less ready to accept an American finger on the safety catch of theatre nuclear weapons in which a great deal of British money will have been invested.

(d) Should we acquire from the Americans a United Kingdom system with United Kingdom warheads? In many ways this is the most attractive option. But it is by far the most expensive and we could not develop and produce United Kingdom warheads for a new GLCM force before 1986 at the earliest.

(e) Will we have a national capability to develop and produce a satisfactory warhead for a GLCM system?

We produced our own warhead for the Polaris missile but there are indications that United States nuclear warhead technology is now some way ahead of our own. Could we be sure that we could develop a satisfactory new warhead at a reasonable cost?

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(f) From our point of view do Ground Launched Cruise Missiles offer obvious advantages over Air Launched or Sea Launched Cruise Missiles? May the apparent United States preference that we should go for GLCM be partly designed to make it easier to get other European NATO allies to accept a new generation of ground launched theatre nuclear weapons? As the United Kingdom possesses a growing force of nuclear submarines should we dismiss the alternative of SLCM too readily?

(g) What are the cost implications of TNF modernisation? Mr. Pym says that no forward financial provision has been made for the modernisation of theatre nuclear weapons in the defence budget. If their costs have to be accommodated without significant addition of that budget, what is the order of magnitude of change which may have to be made to our other defence capabilities in order to accommodate it? There are already indications that the threat to the planned shape and size of the conventional forces is causing disquiet within the Ministry of Defence.

3. You may then wish to ask the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to introduce his minute to you of 6th July (PM/79/62) about Theatre Nuclear Arms Control. The points to establish in subsequent discussion are

(a) Is there general agreement on the policy proposed in Lord Carrington's paragraph 8? Almost certainly yes. But it will not be easy to carry out, and further discussion should concentrate on the main areas of difficulty.

(b) Our views on the German three-phase approach (Lord Carrington's paragraph 4).

The Germans advocate a simultaneous approach on the problem of TNF modernisation and on negotiations on arms control within SALT III.

But it will not be easy to formulate a sensible SALT III negotiating position until we know where we want to go on TNF modernisation.

(c) Should the United Kingdom take part in SALT III negotiations?

No need to decide this yet. But the current state of Comprehensive Test Ban negotiations suggests that there could be risks in involving ourselves too deeply or too early.

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(d) Effect of SALT III negotiations

There are obvious political reasons for the Russians to insist on the inclusion in SALT III of nuclear weapon systems owned by the allies of the USA. If we are to agree, the political and military benefits to the whole Alliance must be clearly shown to be worth while.

Under pressure of negotiation in SALT III how is the United States attitude likely to develop? As cruise missiles are already on the SALT III agenda, are they a sensible system for the United Kingdom to adopt?

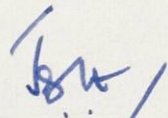
Mr. Pym does not specify a preferred option but clearly expects that GLCMs will be part of our future programme. What is the risk of moving in this direction at the same time as SALT III negotiations may be taking place? The United States may see British plans to acquire GLCMs partly as a negotiating chip. In what circumstances would we be prepared to contemplate modifying or abandoning our plans as part of the SALT III process?

(e) Should we be developing a SALT III negotiating position now?

This might involve the theoretical formulation of theatre nuclear weapons modernisation plans more ambitious than anything we could in fact afford, in order to have something which can be whittled down in the course of SALT III negotiation.

CONCLUSION

4. In the light of discussion, the Committee might be guided:-
- (a) To confirm that Mr. Pym has correctly identified the four principal options open to us.
 - (b) To agree that Mr. Pym should be guided, in his talks with Dr. Brown, by the main points emerging from the present discussion.
 - (c) To invite Mr. Pym to bring the matter before the Committee again as soon as he is in a position to recommend a preferred option.
 - (d) To accept the general lines of the policy on theatre nuclear arms control proposed by Lord Carrington.


JOHN HUNT

9th July, 1979