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DEFENCE AND OVERSEA POLICY COMMITTEE

BASING OF UNITED STATES GROUND-LAUNCHED
CRUISE MISSILES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Note by the Secretaries

1. The Secretary of State for Defence, in his minutes of 18 April and 2 May to the Prime Minister (attached at Annexes A and B) makes proposals for the basing of United States Ground-Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCMs) in the United Kingdom, as follows -

a. United States GLCMs in the United Kingdom should be based at more than one location, not because this is operationally necessary, but for domestic political reasons. The preferred number of locations is three: Greenham Common (Berkshire), Molesworth (Cambridgeshire), and Wethersfield (Essex).

b. The United States, who for financial reasons want only one base in each of the European host countries of the GLCM force, should meet the additional costs of basing at more than one location. For three bases in the United Kingdom, these extra costs would be some £20 million initially plus £3 million a year running costs.

c. In view of American opposition to meeting the extra costs of additional bases not required for operational reasons, we should reduce our requirement from three to two bases, with the United States meeting the smaller extra cost. The two bases would be Greenham Common and Molesworth.

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2. Comments on the Defence Secretary's proposals have been made in minutes from the Home Secretary (dated 6 May, Annex C); the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary (dated 30 April, Annex D); and the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his Private Secretary (dated 29 April and 2 May, Annexes E and F).

3. The central issues for decision are whether, for domestic political reasons, the United States GLCMs in the United Kingdom should be based at more than one location; and, if so, whether the Americans should be pressed to pay the extra costs involved.

4. A single GLCM base in the United Kingdom would be a large base - the largest in Western Europe and could become the focus for noisy and sustained protest over GLCM deployment in this country. The size of the base with its attendant heavy vehicle movements could strengthen the hand of the local protest organisation in a way which might not happen with two or more smaller bases. The Defence Secretary's minute at Annex B makes clear too that the American's preferred choice for a single base would, on practical grounds, be Greenham Common where the local residents have successfully resisted attempts to base a number of tanker aircraft (noise was the main issue). The Home Secretary has drawn attention in his minute at Annex C to the potential public order implications of selecting Greenham Common which happens to be near Aldermaston and Harwell, and thus convenient territory for anti-nuclear campaigners. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, in his minute at Annex D, sets out the other side of the domestic political argument: the effect of going for more than one base could be to increase substantially the number of voices raised against the whole project. In a letter from his Private Secretary dated 2 May (Annex F) the Chancellor of the Exchequer agrees with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's doubts about the political need to base GLCM's in more than one area.

5. If the Committee opts for more than one base the next question is who pays? The Chancellor's view (Annex E) is that any British contribution to the extra costs should be met from the Defence Budget as it stands. The Defence Secretary considers that he will find it difficult to justify meeting these costs in addition to those which we shall have to meet via the NATO infrastructure programme. He proposes to seek a compromise with the Americans in which our requirement would be reduced to two bases, thus significantly reducing the extra costs to them. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary believes that this course of action still risks a confrontation with

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the Americans, who will anyway be meeting a very large proportion of the total GLCM project costs, and who find it hard to understand our line in view of the fragile state of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's agreement on theatre nuclear forces - a subject they see as of particular European concern.

6. The Committee is invited to decide -

a. Whether there should be more than one base in the United Kingdom for United States GLCMs.

b. If so, whether the Americans should be pressed to meet the extra costs.

Signed ROBERT ARMSTRONG
R M HASTIE-SMITH

Cabinet Office
8 May 1980

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PRIME MINISTERBASING OF US GROUND LAUNCHED CRUISE MISSILES (GLCMs)
IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

We now need to decide where in the United Kingdom the US should base the 160 ground launched cruise missiles we have agreed should come here under NATO's long range theatre nuclear force modernisation programme. The Americans have done a fair amount of practical work on this and we have discussed with them exhaustively the issues involved.

2. The Americans want to have only one British base (there will be only one base in each of the other European countries where GLCMs will be based, although it is fair from our point of view to note that we are taking more flights than anyone else). On military grounds I am persuaded that this would be acceptable given the operational concept for GLCMs which was endorsed, with our agreement, at the last meeting of the NATO Nuclear Planning Group; a note explaining this is at Annex, but in essence limited basing is reasonable given that security against attack will be given first by the wide geographical spread of GLCM and other nuclear systems within NATO and, secondly, by the ability to deploy individual GLCM launchers to widely dispersed sites during a period of tension (this can be done in a matter of hours even from a single base). In terms of domestic politics, however, I am clear that it would not be acceptable to have only one base and that it would be preferable to have a minimum of three. The Ministers in my Department agree with this view but believe that two bases would be tolerable. Michael Jopling and the Whips, with whom I have shared the problem, are of the same opinion.

3. I have put my views to Dr Harold Brown, the US Secretary for Defense but he has said that while he is prepared to accept a three, or two, base deployment this could be only on the basis of the UK finding the extra costs involved. Even two bases will be significantly more expensive than one in money and manpower and Dr Brown is apprehensive that if the UK insists upon multi-basing, the FRG and Italy may be tempted to do the same for their own domestic reasons,

thus greatly increasing the global cost of the GLCM programme. We know that the Pentagon is under very strong Congressional pressure to reduce overseas expenditure, particularly on personnel.

4. I consider, however, that the Americans must be pressed on this. My own budget is, as you know, exceptionally hard pressed. I would find it difficult to justify an additional direct burden in respect of GLCM which could even on a conservative basis be as much as an extra £20M in capital and £3M a year in running costs. I therefore propose to resist the US demand. But as a compromise I think that we should be prepared to agree to limiting our requirement to two bases only, thus significantly reducing the extra costs involved. In essence I would say to Dr Brown that we cannot afford a financial contribution beyond what we shall already be making via NATO infrastructure, but that by coming down to two bases we shall be paying a considerable price in terms of domestic political difficulty. We would be prepared to pay that price to ensure the success of the NATO programme but would expect the US to pay what would be for them a relatively small extra resource cost. There is clearly a risk in this approach that we might lose some of the goodwill engendered by our support of the US in the NATO discussions last year, as well as complicating negotiations in other fields. But I believe that it is the right line to take at this stage.

5. As regards the choice of bases, the three sites acceptable to the Americans are the US Air Force standby bases at Greenham Common (Berkshire) and Wethersfield (Essex) together with the former RAF airfield at Molesworth (Cambridgeshire). All three sites are broadly acceptable to us on cost, environmental and safety grounds. For a two base deployment the choice would be Greenham Common and Molesworth. (Greenham Common may, of course, prove particularly difficult, but should be manageable as one of two sites).

6. Whichever combination of sites is chosen, considerable local opposition seems inevitable. I think that we have no alternative but to meet this head-on. I am preparing a vigorous public relations campaign including the distribution of an information folder and an offer to provide Ministerial representation at public meetings, and will be consulting the Paymaster General about this. But a public announcement about the choice of sites must await agreement with the Americans on the cost aspect.

7. Subject to your agreement, I would propose to seek to reach agreement with Dr Brown on the basis of paragraph 4 above.

8. I am sending copies of this minute to the Home Secretary, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Chief Whip; and to the Secretary of the Cabinet.

JP

Ministry of Defence

18th April 1980

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Annex

The Operational Concept for GLCM Basing

1. The operational concept for GLCMs, developed in the NATO High Level Group and endorsed at the NATO Nuclear Planning Group Ministerial Meeting in November, envisages the storage of the missiles in hardened shelters in peacetime (which would provide full protection against conventional attack) and deployment into the field in times of tension. In a deteriorating political situation such deployments could readily be completed within the minimum warning time expected for a major Warsaw Pact attack. (The assumption of such warning is of course in no way peculiar to GLCM dispersal; it is fundamental to the whole of UK and NATO planning for transition to war). The difficulty of locating the missiles once dispersed (they can move up to at least 150 km from base to sites which do not have to be pre-surveyed and which can be changed every few hours) would provide a high degree of protection against either selective nuclear or conventional attack. Because the sites can be chosen virtually at random (the main requirement is a degree of cover) even if an actual deployment turned out to be a false alarm the sites chosen would not compromise the invulnerability of the missiles on a subsequent occasion.

2. The question of vulnerability is therefore essentially confined to the possibility of "bolt from the blue" Soviet selective nuclear strikes intended to disarm NATO's systems below the strategic level capable of striking Soviet territory. By the time the TWF modernisation programme is complete, this would require the destruction of not only the GLCMs based in the UK, but also those based on other sites in Europe; the Pershing II missiles at three bases in the FRG; the F111 aircraft at two bases in the UK; and the aircraft on board two carriers in the Mediterranean. The Russians would also have to take into account the fact that NATO deploys a considerable number of shorter range nuclear capable aircraft (eg Phantoms and in due course Tornado) at some 25 other airfields throughout Europe which, although not capable of reaching the Soviet Union on a normal two-way mission, could do so in extremis by, for example, air-to-air refuelling or recovery to third country airfields. To be successful a selective nuclear attack against the 35-40 targets involved would necessarily inflict massive casualties (including large numbers of US servicemen and dependents). Even then NATO would have the ability to respond on a comparable scale against Soviet targets with submarine launched ballistic missiles, while still retaining both a wide range of short range theatre nuclear weapons for possible use in the event of a major Warsaw Pact conventional attack, and also the full range of strategic forces (SLBMs, and ICBMs and ALCMs based in the United States) for all-out strikes against the Soviet Union in further escalation.

3. The risks to the Soviet Union in such an attack would be enormous compared with the potential gains they could hope to achieve, and it is very difficult to imagine that they would take such risks in isolation without warning and prior to any other type of military action. Increasing the number of GLCM bases in the UK would raise slightly the number of targets and hence the risks the Russians would run, and thus marginally reduce the possibility of their undertaking such action, but this advantage must be weighed against the additional costs which would be involved.

Dispensal of GLCMs

4. The minimum requirement for the rate of dispersal of GLCM missiles from their base is that 50% of available missiles should be at base.

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initial dispersal locations within 6 hours and 100% in 12 hours from normal peacetime readiness. This corresponds to the criteria applied by SACEUR for bringing aircraft to full readiness. The normal pattern for dispersal would be for the quick reaction alert (QRA) flight to remain in position until the first flight to disperse had reached its dispersal site and declared itself "ready to launch". The QRA flight would disperse next followed by the remainder as rapidly as possible.

5. Each dispersing GLCM flight consists of 23 vehicles and about 60 men. Their rate of dispersal depends upon a number of factors and these can be considered in two groups. The first is the time taken to declare the convoy operationally ready (although not "ready to launch") and this will be dependent upon such things as the assembly and recall of manpower; the recovery of missiles from first and second line servicing; the arming of the missiles; and the briefing of crews. The second is the time taken to disperse from the GLCM security area into the open countryside and this will be dependent upon such things as the numbers of exit gates both from the GLCM site and from the main camp; the availability of access to and the proximity from major road links; and the avoidance of routes with readily identifiable choke points.

6. The problem of declaring the flights operationally ready is not different to that encountered by any operational flying squadron and the solution will be similar. It will probably be dependent on the manpower and support facilities available, and the US have based their estimates on the need to meet SACEUR's requirements. Use of more than one base would only improve the rate of dispersal to the extent that additional manpower/facilities would necessarily be involved. The problem of dispersal off base is somewhat different. Whilst the launch and launch control vehicles will have a cross-country mobility, it will obviously be quicker and more reliable to use the existing network of roads. It is therefore important for a base to satisfy the criteria listed in paragraph 5. Additionally the availability of wooded cover in the immediate vicinity would be an advantage as it would markedly reduce transit time for a percentage of the flights. Provided these conditions are met dispersal from a single base is unlikely to take significantly longer than that from several bases, but such a base might well require a good system of traffic control in the unlikely event that several flights became operationally ready at the same time. Taking both sets of factors into account from a normal peacetime state of readiness 10 flights could all be dispersed within 10 to 12 hours, thus meeting SACEUR's requirements, but with prior warning this time could be made shorter.

7. The time taken to deploy 10 GLCM flights does entail a degree of heightened vulnerability. Since initial off-base movement could be observed, it could act as a warning signal to the Soviet Union, and an attempt could then be made to prevent further deployment by nuclear strike, conventional air attack or subversive activity. It is unlikely, however, that SACEUR would order GLCM generation in isolation, and it could be expected that similar warning would be provided by a number of activities including the movement of Pershing IIs and the arming of dual-capable aircraft. Wide scale pre-emption would therefore be necessary, and this is unlikely for the reasons discussed above. Nevertheless any reduction in dispersal time that could be achieved would have some operational benefit.

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ANNEX B

PRIME MINISTER

BASING OF US GROUND LAUNCHED CRUISE MISSILES
(GLCMs) IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

I understand that you would like to have a brief discussion at OD on 7th May of the proposals in my minute of 18th April. I am accordingly, with this minute, circulating copies to those members of OD who have not already received it.

2. In my earlier minute I tried to set out the military and political considerations affecting what UK basing arrangements we should accept. As I explained, on purely military grounds I consider that it would be acceptable to have only one base but on grounds of domestic politics I think that we should have more - ideally three, but, at any rate, a minimum of two.

3. Specific basing arrangements were not, of course, discussed within the Alliance when the December decision on LRTNF modernisation was taken so that we start with a clean slate on this and we also start in the light of the fact that we are taking the largest number of missiles - 160, compared with the Germans' 96 and the Italians' 112 and the projected deployment to Belgium of 48. Even with a two base deployment, one of our bases would, with seven flights, be as large as the single Italian base (also seven flights) and it would be larger than the German base (six flights). Even although other countries will base their missiles on one base, therefore, I think it would be quite reasonable for us to have more than one.

4. There is also the negative consideration that, if we were to have only one base, the best practical choice - and the one the Americans would press for - would be Greenham Common and while it might be possible to overcome local opposition to having a base there if there were also another elsewhere, I do not believe, given recent history, that it could otherwise be managed. As what was said in the Defence Debate this week made clear, we are in any case

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going to face real difficulties on basing. We must start from a position from which we have a reasonable chance of succeeding.

5. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, in his minute of 30th April, has referred to the risks of a confrontation with the Americans on this issue. I appreciate that they have, as he says, made an important and generous commitment on TNF modernisation but I would suggest that we should not under-estimate the part on this we ourselves have played within the Alliance. I do not think that reasoned discussion on the subject between myself and Harold Brown should cause undue strains to develop. The US/UK defence relationship in any case goes two ways. The Americans require a number of things from us - particularly facilities for basing or staging US forces in peace and war - just as we require a number of things from them. The American objection to multi-basing is not so much one of principle as of cost, both here and in the other NATO countries; the extra cost to them of one base, as opposed to two, would, in terms of the US Defense Budget, be marginal, and I think this should be pursued with them.

6. I am sending copies of this minute with, where appropriate, copies of my minute of 18th April, to the members of OD, and the Chief Whip; and a copy also goes to the Secretary of the Cabinet.

Handwritten initials: JP

Ministry of Defence

2nd May 1980

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BASING OF US GROUND LAUNCHED CRUISE MISSILES (GLCMs) IN THE UK

Thank you for sending me a copy of your minute of 18 April to the Prime Minister about the choice of base sites for the GLCMs. I have no strong views on the question of the number of sites (though I incline to think two would be right) or on the arrangements for carrying the cost (though here again I tend to share your view). However, there is one point I should like to make about the possible choice of Greenham Common as one of the bases.

I know that you already appreciate from previous experience that local opposition at this site may be particularly vigorous. Its relative proximity to London and to other centres would make it an especially easy target for possible demonstrations mounted by anti-nuclear campaigners. And the fact that it is less than 10 miles as the crow flies from Aldermaston and some 15 from Harwell would be additional factors.

I appreciate that the potential public order implications of the choice of sites cannot be an overriding consideration. But it is something we ought, I think, to keep in mind, and initial consideration here suggests that Greenham Common might pose particular problems from that point of view. Moreover, whatever the sites chosen, the proposed public meetings you mention could well become targets for disruption by CND-type activists, especially perhaps if Ministers are involved in them. It would therefore be helpful if your officials could keep in touch with mine about the development of your thoughts.

Handwritten signature: Francis Pym

The Rt Hon Francis Pym MC MP

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PRIME MINISTER

Basing of US Ground Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCMs) in the
United Kingdom

1. I have seen a copy of the Defence Secretary's minute to you of 18 April suggesting that we should press the Americans to pay some of the additional costs of a second GLCM base.
2. Francis Pym mentions the risks of a confrontation with the Americans on this issue. In the present state of transatlantic relations I think we must weigh these risks carefully with the financial and domestic considerations.
3. For the Americans the December decisions on TNF represented an important and generous commitment by them to the defence of Europe, meeting a problem which they see as one of particular European concern. They have agreed to find a very large proportion of the costs which are militarily unavoidable, but are unwilling to pay as well for extra costs arising from essentially local considerations. They are also concerned that agreement to funding the bases in the United Kingdom would lead to similar difficulties elsewhere.
4. We have seen recent signs that NATO's decision on TNF may be at risk, with Chancellor Schmidt's remarks on TNF arms control and growing evidence that the Belgians will be unable to agree to GLCM basing in Belgium by their June deadline. I believe that the Americans, particularly Congress, will find it hard to understand our proposed line in view of the fragile state of the TNF agreement particularly since our reasons, as we are all agreed, would not be military but domestic.
5. Moreover, in my view, the domestic political judgement is finely balanced. I note that Michael Joplin and the Whips support Francis Pym's views. But I wonder whether the degree of opposition to GLCMs will be lessened by basing them in two areas rather than one. The effect of this could be to increase / substantially

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substantially the number of voices raised against the whole project. It is not clear to me that the overall level of opposition would be reduced by diffusing it more widely.

6. In short, I suggest that it would be preferable neither to meet the cost of dual basing ourselves nor to press the Americans further but that we should revert to the idea of a single base.

7. I am copying this letter to the Defence Secretary, the Home Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Chief Whip and the Secretary of the Cabinet.

(CARRINGTON)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

30 April

Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG
01-233 3000

29 April 1980

The Rt Hon Francis Pym MP
Secretary of State for Defence

BASING OF US GROUND LAUNCHED CRUISE MISSILES (GLCMs) IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

I have read with interest your minute of 18 April to the Prime Minister reporting the difficulties of agreeing with the Americans on the number of bases in the UK for US GLCMs.

I ought perhaps to make clear that the full costs to the UK of the NATO long range theatre nuclear force modernisation programme, including any previously unforeseen direct basing costs, must in my view be contained within your agreed Defence Budget and cash limit ceilings. I fear that my view would not change even if you were unable to secure agreement that the Americans should meet all costs additional to those of their preferred single-base solution, but were nevertheless to opt for two bases.

I am copying this to the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Chief Whip; and to the Secretary of the Cabinet.

GEOFFREY HOWE

BASING OF US GROUND LAUNCHED MISSILES (GLCMs) IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Since sending his letter of 29 April to your Secretary of State, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has seen the Foreign Secretary's minute of 30 April. It is possible that he will have to leave OD before this item is reached, and with this in mind has asked me to let you know that he very much shares the Foreign Secretary's doubts about the political need to base GLCMs in more than one area.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to the Home Secretary, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Chief Whip and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours etc,

MHC

M A HALL
Private Secretary