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CABINET

DEFENCE AND OVERSEA POLICY COMMITTEE

CIVIL PREPAREDNESS FOR HOME DEFENCE

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Home Department

At our meeting on 20th March (OD(80) 9th Meeting, item 3) we considered my memorandum OD(80)22 and agreed that I should make an early statement, on the lines proposed in paragraphs 6 and 10 of the paper, which should not arouse expectations which we could not fulfil.

2. Although we are to restrict our first steps to measures costing £1m in 1980/81 rising to £5m in 1983/84, I believe that they will be considered inadequate by many people and by most of our own supporters. We should therefore make it clear that work on certain aspects of the review continues and that, if this work shows further measures to be cost effective, they will be implemented as and when they can be accommodated in public expenditure plans.

3. There is further work to be done on refining the remaining options in paragraph 82 of the Annex to OD(80)23. And two further studies are required to provide policy options (one of which would, of course, be to do nothing): a study of the demands which war, particularly conventional war, would place on industry; and a study of the implications of the "stay put" policy and the need for assistance in providing shelter for at least some of the population and protection of civilians against chemical attack. If these studies are to be embarked upon - as I think would be right - we ought I think to say so. This is bound to arouse expectations of increased expenditure, which we shall need to damp down. On this basis I propose that the studies should proceed.

4. The relatively small cost of the first steps on which we have already agreed has been met within existing provision. It would be much more difficult for my colleagues and me to absorb expenditure on options such as stockpiles, transport and communication facilities and the fire service. And it would be impracticable to undertake, within our existing provision, any major measures on shelter or dispersal, industrial planning, of protection against chemical attack. When we have the result of the studies - probably in the late summer - we shall need to consider, in the light of our expenditure priorities, any proposals involving significant further expenditure, bearing in mind our strong reluctance to contemplate extra expenditure at the expense of the Contingency Reserve.

5. I therefore propose making a statement on the lines of the draft at Annex. This describes the limited steps on which we have already agreed, and states that their cost is to be found from off-setting savings within existing public expenditure plans. It also touches upon the threat (as in the Defence White Paper), acknowledges the possibility that more may need to be done to meet it, mentions the further work remaining to be done on the review, including the two major studies on industry and on shelter and dispersal; and sets all this in the context of the present severe financial constraints. My judgment is that a statement of this kind is needed as an effective response to public and Parliamentary concern.

6. I invite my colleagues to -

- a. authorise further studies by officials on the remaining options, on industrial planning and on shelter and dispersal;
- b. note that we shall need to consider the outcome of these studies in the light of our expenditure priorities; and
- c. agree that I should make the statement at Annex.

W. W.

Home Office
Queen Anne's Gate

2 May 1980

DRAFT

HOME SECRETARY'S STATEMENT ON THE HOME DEFENCE REVIEW

Mr. Speaker, I will with permission make a statement on my review of home defence.

This has been a wide-ranging review of the home defence arrangements, embracing the home defence responsibilities of many of my Right Honourable Friends. The review is continuing, but I am now announcing certain immediate steps which the Government judge to be necessary.

On taking office a year ago, the Government decided to accord priority to the defence of the nation; and a study of home defence was set in train so that this important element of our defence strategy was reviewed along with action to enhance our general defence effort. Recent international developments have confirmed the wisdom of that decision.

As to the threat, I would remind the House of what my right honourable friend said in paragraph 110 of his Statement on the Defence Estimates 1980. He said that Soviet strategists hold that any war in Europe is likely to escalate into a nuclear exchange, though it might start with conventional warfare; that the Soviet leaders have at their disposal the forces to conduct almost any form of campaign they may regard as necessary; that their ability to prepare rapidly for war, and to attack at a time and place of their own choosing, has improved and is still improving; and that the warning time we might receive before attack could be very limited.

Against this background the Government has decided to take the following immediate steps.

The United Kingdom Warning and Monitoring Organisation will modernise its communications, replace certain obsolescent equipment and improve the allowances paid to the volunteers of the Royal Observer Corps who play a vital part in maintaining our systems for warning the public of the approach of fallout and for monitoring its intensity. The additional annual cost at 1979 survey prices will be about £0.5m in 1980/81, rising to £1.15m in 1983/84.

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The Government will consult the local authority associations on the allocation of additional resources for local planning and for training. At present, grant is paid only to county councils and the GLC, and to the Scottish Regional and Islands authorities, and covers 75% of the cost of small emergency planning teams, essential training and the communications rooms of county wartime headquarters. Subject to the views of the associations, the Government proposes to extend to district councils from 1982 onwards limited financial assistance to district councils with the aim of completing the pattern of local authority wartime headquarters and communications.

We also recognise that many county and regional councils at present lack the resources to plan for community involvement below district level. The Government is ready to make more money available to county councils with this objective in mind, and will discuss with the associations the most effective ways of doing so.

We are anxious to enable local planners to maximise the contribution made by the large numbers of citizens, both individuals and members of organisations, who wish to add their efforts to home defence planning. Many volunteers are already active in the home defence field and the voluntary organisations are also keen to play their full part.

These measures to improve local planning are likely to mean additional expenditure of £1.5m in 1981/82, rising to £3m in 1983/84.

There will be an increase in home defence planning and training by the staffs of central government departments and of the National Health Service; and an increase in the capacity of the Home Defence College at Easingwold, which does so much to widen home defence awareness among senior staffs of local and other authorities. The additional cost of these measures will be about £0.6m in 1980/81, rising to £0.85m in 1983/84.

I announced some time ago my decision to place the booklet "Protect and Survive" on public sale, and I can now inform the House that it will be in the bookshops tomorrow at a price of 50 pence. I want to make it clear that this does not mean that the Government believes an attack on this country is imminent. Nor are we suggesting that everyone should now start implementing the guidance in the booklet. What the Government is doing is responding to the desire of many people to be better informed of the implications of an attack and of the measures which they could take in that event to protect themselves.

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E.P.

The total additional costs of all these measures, for Great Britain, will be just over £1m in 1980/81 rising to £5m in 1983/84. These costs will be met from within the provision made for public expenditure in the recently published White Paper on the Government's Expenditure Plans to 1983/84.

I turn now to certain further studies which are in progress. I should first make it clear that in reaching its future decisions the Government will take into account not only the likely effectiveness of the proposed steps but also the severe constraints on public expenditure. I do not want to imply that additional funds will necessarily be available for all or any of the measures which may be desirable.

The Government is, nevertheless, continuing to examine a number of further ways of improving our home defence arrangements: stockpiles of essential supplies; transport and port facilities; wartime communications and broadcasting; industrial planning; and the emergency services. As an example of what is being done to maintain the preparedness of the fire service, the stock of emergency appliances known as Green Goddesses is being refurbished this year at a cost of over £1m, in addition to £0.4m spent on their renovation after use in the 1977 firemen's strike.

Finally, I turn to the important and related issues of population dispersal and the provision of shelter. As the House knows, the policy is that people will be advised to stay put and as far as possible to protect themselves in their own homes. The problems here are complex, and further policy options are still being studied. A separate study is being made of domestic or family shelters, and advice should be available to the public later this year on a range of structures which could provide improved protection at relatively low cost.

Mr Speaker, the Government is determined to ensure that our civil preparations are in line with our general defence capability. The measures I have announced today are positive and cost-effective. We shall continue to give these matters close attention, as I have no doubt the House will. It is right that the House should take as much note of our civil defence capability as of our military defence.