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Prime Minister

(2)

We have never received a satisfactory explanation from the

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Americans as to why they panicked on 14 July. But it is noteworthy that they chose to brief senior Congressional leaders six days before you were due to tell Cabinet & DIS so without consulting us.

PRIME MINISTER

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Sir Nicholas Henderson has obtained, by means which he has not *Am*
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disclosed to me, a copy of the briefing given by the White House to Congressional Leaders to prepare them for the Trident announcement. I attach a copy herewith. We are not supposed to have seen it, and cannot therefore take issue with the White House either on the timing or the substance; but I do not think I would want to anyway. It was probably advisable, in United States domestic political terms, for the President to provide advance briefing to the Congressional Leaders; and, though we might take issue with the suggestion that it was we who were insisting on very tight secrecy, the briefing's references to the importance of the British alliance are interesting and welcome.

I am sending copies of this minute and the briefing to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence.

REA

(Robert Armstrong)

21st July 1980

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

11 July 80

*Synopsis of Information Provided
to Sen. Far Relations and House Int. Relations Committees*

-- On ~~Thursday, June~~ ^{Tue, July} 15, Prime Minister Thatcher will be informing the House of Commons of her decision to modernize the existing British strategic nuclear deterrent force of POLARIS SSBNs.

-- In this connection, she has requested to the President that the United States sell the UK TRIDENT I missiles. These new missiles would be carried in new submarines that will be built in Britain and would go into service in the early 1990s. The warheads would of course be provided by the United Kingdom.

-- The President has informed the Prime Minister that he agrees to sell the TRIDENT I Missile.

-- This is an important strategic decision for both the United States and the United Kingdom. It culminates lengthy sensitive bilateral discussions and analysis.

-- The Independent British deterrent force has been an important element of the NATO deterrence structure for some time. We strongly favor maintaining a viable British strategic nuclear capability into the twenty-first century. We agree with the British assessment that the MIRVed TRIDENT is the best way for them to achieve this.

-- Strategic cooperation is also an important -- if not the central -- component of the close cooperation between the US and UK, a relationship that encompasses close cooperation on foreign and defense policy across-the-board. It is crucial for the future that this special relationship be maintained.

-- The TRIDENT sale will also be financially beneficial for the US. We estimate that it will be worth \$2.5B in 1980 dollars for the US, including a 5 percent surcharge to cover our already sunk R&D costs. Further, to make an additional contribution to our R&D expenses, the British have agreed to man -- at their cost -- the highly capable RAPIER missile system, which we will buy to defend US airbases in the UK from air attack.

-- In connection with this sale, the British have stated that it is their objective to take advantage of the economies made possible by US cooperation on the TRIDENT sale to re-inforce their efforts to upgrade their conventional forces.

-- The sale is consistent with SALT. As you know, we made clear that cooperation with our Allies would be permitted under the SALT II Treaty. The Senate strongly supported this position. The British deterrent force was clearly in everybody's mind.

-- The sale will be made under US laws and procedures. This means that we will notify the Congress, as called for by Section 36-b of the Arms Export Control Act.

-- We will need your help to ensure a smooth and expeditious Congressional review as called for in Section 36-b. To avoid delays in their program, the British need to be able to start work under a formally binding agreement in the early Fall.

-- It is our intention to submit our formal notice to the Congress when you reconvene on July 21. (We believe the nature of this case justifies abbreviating the normal twenty-day "informal" notice that we normally give to Congressional staffs before submitting our formal notice -- which involves a continuation of long-standing cooperation with our closest ally)*

* Senator Church, Representative Zablocki only.

-- To assist the Congress, I am prepared -- along with others in the Administration -- to provide you with whatever details that you need.

-- I must ask that you keep this information in the strictest confidence until the Prime Minister makes her announcement on ~~Thursday~~ ^{Tuesday}. The British have strongly requested that we keep these facts limited to a very few people, but the President felt that it is important that you have advance notice.