

PERSONAL



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D/S of S/94/81

27th February 1981

Dear Jock.

Thank you for your letter of 24th February about the Trident decision taken by the Government, and our intention to seek endorsement of it on Tuesday next. I am very grateful to you for giving me notice of your concern.

This is, of course, a major and complex issue. The Prime Minister made clear in public, before we were elected to office, that we intended to maintain Britain's strategic nuclear capability in the long term. This was also a Manifesto commitment. It was clear then, as it is now, that the job could not be done for nothing, and that money spent on this was money not spent on other things. But the amount of money spent on defence effort other than strategic nuclear capability will continue to grow steadily; and you will be aware of the public commitment to the sustained improvement of our conventional effort which the Prime Minister made on the Government's behalf when she signed the exchange of letters with the US President on Trident. That commitment stands.

To claim that our capability "re-duplicates" that of the US and France (an opinion which neither of those countries shares, either privately or publicly) is surely to ignore the essential point of our effort, sustained by Governments of both

Jock Bruce-Gardyne Esq MP

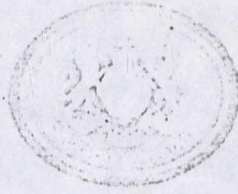


parties since the 1950s and explained very clearly by Francis Pym in the January debate last year and in the thorough memorandum he published in July. And to dismiss it as relevant only "in extremis" is, I would respectfully suggest, to misinterpret the meaning and working of deterrence. At a moment when the Soviet Union is steadily increasing its nuclear superiority over the West I cannot think that this is the time for Britain to opt out of this aspect of our defence effort.

Of course, our defence effort, as with all our Alliance partners, is under resource pressures. But the suggestion that we are "stripping the forces of proper equipment" and it is "impossible for them to use the equipment they have got" is quite untrue. It would be more true to say that we have too wide a range of R & D commitments when we might have concentrated them on a narrower range. But, together, these equipment programmes are far larger than the total estimated cost of Trident - (and some of them are individually larger). Trident, of course, is a big bill; but you are wrong in supposing that 3% of the defence budget in the investment period and 1½-2% thereafter would create a major transformation of our effort in the far more expensive conventional fields where we contribute to the Alliance. You do, I am sure, recognise as nonsense such suggestions as those of Alun Chalfont in the Lords last Thursday, about what the money would buy elsewhere.

Your letter implies that your quarrel is with the basic role rather than with the choice of Trident to fulfil it. But in case you are in doubt on the latter point, I can say that when I arrived here one of my first tasks was to brief myself on all the detailed background to the choice of Trident, and I am absolutely convinced that it is right. Trident is by far the most cost-effective choice.

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I shall, of course, be presenting the case in the debate. I am confident that when you have heard all the arguments, as I am sure you intend to, you will accept that it would be very damaging for the Government if you, in particular, were to dissociate yourself from Government policy on this key matter.

I am sending a copy of this letter, as you did of yours, to the Chief Whip.

Samson
John.

John Nott