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61 Defence

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PRIME MINISTER

TRIDENT

We have to take decisions very soon about various aspects of the Trident force, especially submarine design. This involves the question of whether to stay with Trident I (C.4) or go for Trident II (D.5).

2. The issues are complicated and important, and I shall of course bring them to my colleagues. But the complication is heightened by the fact that the US themselves have not yet decided whether to go for D.5. It seems increasingly certain that they will, and increasingly likely that they will do so fairly soon. But until this is settled our own decision-making is made very awkward.

3. I believe therefore that it would be useful if you mentioned the matter briefly when you see President Reagan in Ottawa. It would not be necessary or appropriate to say firmly now that we wanted D.5, still less to get into questions of terms. We need simply to register the point that we are much interested in their decision on the future of D.5, and hope it will be taken soon.

/ 4. I attach at Annex a background note.

5. I am sending copies to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

J.W.

Ministry of Defence

15th July 1981

SECRET

TRIDENT: C.4 AND D.5

1. The July 1980 UK/US agreement on Trident was for the C.4 missile. D.5 seemed to lie too far in an uncertain future to be a candidate.
2. C.4, already operational with the US Navy, carried up to eight MIRVs. D.5 could be in USN service from 1989 and would carry up to fourteen more accurate MIRVs. The ranges are much the same (4000-6000 nm depending on warhead).
3. There are two reasons why we need to decide soon whether to stay with C.4 or switch to D.5 -
  - a. We are already having to commit money on C.4; if we really want D.5, the sooner we stop this the better.
  - b. We need to decide our basic submarine configuration in the near future. The choice of missile may make a difference to the number of missile tubes.
4. Against the disadvantage of extra cost D.5 would have the key advantage of much longer assurance of commonality with the US (C.4 could conceivably be phased out of US service only a few years after our deployment of it was complete in 1995). It would also give us greater operational capability, and so more insurance margin against advances in Soviet capability (especially ABMs). Furthermore it could enable us to use - if we so decided - the American basing and maintenance facilities off the East Coast of the US; thus substantially reducing our major financial commitment to a major storage and maintenance depot at Coulport, Scotland (where Strathclyde are increasingly anti-Trident).



The Secretary of State for Defence expects to recommend to his colleagues that D.5, if developed and if made available to the UK, would be the better choice.

5. We cannot take it formally for granted that the US would accede to a UK request for D.5, nor that the terms (eg on R&D levy) would be the same as for C.4. These matters would be for Presidential decision. But the Pentagon view, from Mr Weinberger down, plainly favours a UK shift to D.5.

6. It was originally thought that the US would not take a D.5 decision until 1983, or perhaps late 1982. There are however now increasing signs - especially given the problems over how to base the MX land-based ICBM - that the Administration may be disposed to a considerably earlier decision. DoD indications are that a UK push in this direction would not be ill received.