

Ref. A082/0079

PRIME MINISTER

MISC 7: Nuclear Defence Issues

## BACKGROUND

The meeting has been arranged at the Secretary of State for Defence's request to discuss the issues raised in his minute of 20 October supplemented by his minute of 4 November. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary commented briefly in his minute of 25 October and more fully in his minute of 3 November.

2. The Secretary of State for Defence's main concern is with the public presentation of the Government's policies. His suggestions relate to:

- a. the basing of United States Ground Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCMs) in the United Kingdom, in accordance with NATO's "two-track" decision of December 1979;
  - b. the possibility of an arms control initiative involving reductions in the number of NATO's battlefield nuclear weapons.
3. On GLCMs, the Secretary of State for Defence raises three issues:
- a. The possibility of deferring the arrival of the equipment at Greenham Common (the airfield outside Newbury which will be the first operational GLCM base in the United Kingdom - the other, Molesworth in Cambridgeshire, will not be activated until much later). Under present plans, the vehicles will arrive in June 1983, the first missiles in August and the whole system will become operative in December, thus being visible during an autumn General Election. Mr Nott reports that the new German Defence Minister, Herr Worner, would like the arrival of the equipment in the United Kingdom delayed to bring it into line with the arrival time in Germany.
  - b. The need for British personnel to be involved in guarding the missiles (which will be deployed from time to time on large vehicles outside the base, for training purposes).



c. The need for British personnel to be trained to operate the missiles, so as to keep open the possibility of moving at some later date to a 'dual-key' arrangement. ('Dual-Key' means physical arrangements which require the co-operation of personnel of both countries before the weapon can be fired; they exist for the American-owned but British-operated battlefield nuclear weapons in Germany such as the Lance missile. The Government decided in December 1979 not to have dual-key arrangements for GLCMs since the Americans would have required us to buy the missile system itself and operate it with our own personnel.)

4. On arms control, the Secretary of State for Defence suggests that a British initiative to secure reductions in NATO's battlefield nuclear weapons would help to reassure British public opinion that the Government believes in the disarmament process.

5. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary is against making any move to defer the deployment of cruise missiles because any sign of British vacillation could lead to the unravelling of Alliance support for NATO's 1979 decision; risk bringing about the collapse of the NATO long-range theatre nuclear weapon deployment programme; and significantly reduce the pressure on the Russians to make concessions in the Geneva negotiations on reductions of intermediate range nuclear forces (INF). The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary is also doubtful about the scope for a specifically British arms control initiative on short range battlefield nuclear weapons, bearing in mind that these are American weapons deployed in Germany, and that the possibility of making reductions is already under active study within the Alliance.

HANDLING

6. A convenient order for discussion would be:

- a. GLCMs -
  - i. Guarding
  - ii. 'Dual-Key' and Training
  - iii. Timing of Deployment
- b. Battlefield Nuclear Weapons



7. Guarding should present no real problem. It would be normal for perimeter security at Greenham Common, and guarding of cruise missile vehicles deployed outside the bases, to be done by RAF or civil police, while the Americans guard their warheads (which would never in peacetime leave the special store inside the base).

8. The Secretary of State for Defence does not propose to reopen with the Americans the decision not to have a 'dual-key' arrangement (the Germans would certainly not want a 'dual-key' arrangement). His concern is to keep the option open for a later stage. If this is his objective, it seems neither desirable nor necessary to seek to arrange for British personnel to be trained now to operate the missiles: this would involve telling the Americans why we wanted the training, thus in effect reopening the 'dual-key' question; and the training could in any case be carried out relatively quickly if, at some later date, we did decide to buy the missiles in order to have a 'dual-key' arrangement.

9. The Secretary of State for Defence may in fact have in mind the need to give the appearance of British control through British servicemen being seen to be involved. You will recall that the Americans have agreed that GLCMs will be subject to the same United Kingdom/United States understandings as are other United States nuclear weapons based in the United Kingdom. The public formula governing American nuclear bases in this country is that "use of the bases in an emergency would be a matter for joint decision by Her Majesty's Government and the United States Government in the light of the circumstances prevailing at the time". Privately, the understandings require the President to speak personally to the Prime Minister regarding joint decision to commit forces located in the United Kingdom. (But, of course, the United Kingdom has no physical control.)

10. The timing question is more complex. The key date is December 1983, when NATO has agreed that the missiles should be deployed and in service unless sufficient progress has been achieved in arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union to make this unnecessary. It is accepted that preparations for deployment will have to start well before that date: on present plans Britain would be the first



country to receive the equipment, starting in June 1983. Information from Bonn subsequent to the Secretary of State for Defence's minute is that the Germans' real concern is not so much at Britain getting ahead of the FRG; rather they think that deployment to any country as early as June 1983 would risk arousing public criticism that the Alliance had not given the arms control negotiations enough time to make progress: and the Russians might use the first deployment of GLCMs or GLCM-related equipment to Europe as an excuse to walk out of the Geneva INF talks. A further complication is that the deployment date for the Pershing IIs, due to be in place and operational in Germany by December 1983, may slip beyond September because of delays in the production programme.

11. For the United Kingdom, there would be no difficulty about putting off the arrival of the equipment by two or three weeks to avoid a June 1983 election; nor is there a risk of any close connection with a 1984 election. The potential difficulties arise over an October 1983 election, and could be avoided only by postponing arrival of the first equipment until late November or December.

12. The issues therefore are:

a. Do Ministers prefer to stick to existing deployment plans and ride out criticism if necessary during an election campaign?

b. If not, should we leave it to the Germans to make the running with the Americans on the need for a later date (November or December 1983) for GLCM deployment to the United Kingdom? This would deflect on to the Germans any criticism of lack of staunchness, since we have to reckon with the likelihood that any request to the Americans would leak in Washington.

13. On the possibility of a British arms control initiative on battle-field nuclear weapons, you should ask the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to report on the ideas which have been put forward privately by Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Ministry of Defence officials to the Americans and the Germans for speeding up the work of the NATO group which is studying the rationalisation and reduction of the stockpile of short-range nuclear weapons in Europe, with a view to

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enabling NATO to announce a reduction in the stockpile by mid-1983. An ill-timed British initiative could upset our allies and impede the work already under way: on the other hand it is highly desirable that the work should be pushed ahead without delay. The Secretary of State for Defence might be encouraged to speak to Mr Weinberger privately in this sense. But there does not seem to be much scope for a public United Kingdom initiative at the present time.

CONCLUSION

14. Subject to the discussion, you might guide the meeting to reach the following conclusions:

- a. On balance, we should stick to the existing timing for GLCM deployment and avoid giving any impression of wavering in the face of public pressures over Greenham Common.
- b. If the Americans themselves propose any delay, whether for their own reasons or because of pressure from the Germans, we should be prepared to agree.
- c. Security arrangements similar to those at existing United States nuclear bases in the United Kingdom should apply to the GLCMs.
- d. We should not at present ask the Americans to train British personnel to operate GLCMs or their vehicles.
- e. The United Kingdom should take no public initiative on arms control for the time being, but we should work bilaterally and within NATO to expedite the current Alliance review of its battlefield nuclear weapons with a view to achieving an early reduction.

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