



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

17 January 1983

Dear Mr Owen.

Thank you for your further letter of 22 December, about cruise missile deployments in Britain.

Cruise missiles, should they be deployed here, will certainly represent a change in the American nuclear forces based in Britain since we have not hosted US land-based missiles for some years. But the part they play in the strategy of deterrence and their capacity to prevent the Russians threatening NATO from a Soviet sanctuary will be similar to that of the F-111 aircraft which have been based here for many years. Our aim, I believe, must be to generate the same public confidence in the Anglo/US arrangements covering the cruise missiles and their bases as has long existed for the F-111 bases and indeed the bases of other US nuclear forces in this country.

You contrast the arrangements foreseen for cruise missiles with those governing the Lance missile system. The case of Lance is rather different, not because it is deployed in central Europe, but because we chose to purchase the missiles and their launchers, as have the other European allies who operate this short-range missile system. As you know, the option to purchase cruise missiles and their launchers (but not warheads), which would have given us physical control, was one which we decided against in 1979. I do not think that you yourself took a different view on this point at the time.

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I cannot accept your charge that the decision to base cruise missiles here has not been fully debated in the House. Subsequent to the debate in January 1980 we have had three debates on nuclear defence issues and following the last one, on 15 December, the vote again endorsed Government policy. The NATO Alliance has taken its decision. We must now show firmness in implementing this decision, both in respect of deployment and in negotiation at Geneva, if the Russians are to be brought to abandon their present unreasonable position. Nevertheless, I fully agree that Parliament should continue to have the proper opportunity to express itself on these important matters and I intend to ensure that this is so.

As for negotiations, the 'zero option' remains far and away the best goal for the negotiations. But we have all along made it clear that we shall listen to and consider very carefully serious Soviet counter-proposals. Secondly, the deployment programme is far from irreversible. Even if the first deployments do have to take place at the end of this year, the five year programme for the basing of cruise and Pershing II missiles in Western Europe could be stopped, changed or reversed at any time if agreement at Geneva permitted it.

Yours sincerely
Raymond Hester

The Rt Hon. Dr. David Owen, M.P.,
