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THE PRIME MINISTER

Control Arrangements for UK-Based Cruise Missiles

1. I have seen a copy of Michael Heseltine's minute to you of 25 January. I agree with him about the penalties involved in seeking to change the present arrangements, in terms of deterrence, cost and possible delay to the whole NATO programme.
2. There are also political difficulties about any major new initiatives on the control issue. First, there is the question of confidence. It would in my view risk causing damaging repercussions if the UK (of all Allies) were to be responsible at this critical stage for reopening the control issue, which could only be interpreted publicly as a lack of confidence in the good faith or good judgement of the US Administration in time of crisis. Second, the Americans certainly will not thank us for the complications that this will bring for them in respect of other basing countries, particularly the FRG and Italy. The argument that as a nuclear power the UK enjoys special status may be true as an explanation of why the longstanding UK/US nuclear understandings go further than what other Allies have so far obtained. But if today we ourselves are seen to find these arrangements insufficient, the Americans will rightly fear that the anxieties of less privileged Allies (notably the Italians) will thereby be greatly fuelled. As for the Germans, no Government in Bonn emerging from the March elections is likely to wish to alter the present arrangements. But if we ask for a change the German Government would paradoxically be exposed to even sharper criticisms from the anti-nuclear

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movement there, for apparently being ready to live with a 'risk' that even the British have judged insupportable. The wider effects for all nuclear basing throughout NATO Europe are difficult to predict, but the Americans will be understandably nervous.

3. Finally, we should not ignore the potential disadvantages for our arms control objectives. The possible delays in the GLCM programme and the certain impression of lack of confidence will combine to erode allied firmness over the 1979 deployment decision, which is our best card for persuading the Russians to make real concessions at the INF negotiating table. In addition, any new arrangements which blur the perception of cruise missiles here as a wholly US-owned and operated system and introduce more overt British involvement could weaken our position that the British deterrent as such has no place in the INF negotiations. The argument would be made that if cruise missiles 'under British control' are covered by INF negotiations, there is no good reason why Polaris should not be included too, as the Russians insist.

4. These considerations lead me to the conclusion that if after further reflection some adjustment of the present position on control proves unavoidable, the best course is that indicated by Michael Heseltine, namely to review and up-date the existing UK/US understandings, modifying our public line accordingly; and to combine this with an announcement of our intention to increase the level of participation of UK service personnel, putting the accent on physical security procedures at the bases. How much time we have for this further reflection will of course depend partly on our decision about the dates for delivery of cruise missiles and associated equipment, on which I have seen Michael Heseltine's separate minute.

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5. I am sending copies to Michael Heseltine, Geoffrey Howe, William Whitelaw and Sir Robert Armstrong.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'FP', with a horizontal line underneath.

(FRANCIS PYM)

Foreign & Commonwealth Office

26 January 1983

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