

Ref: B06416

MR COLES

c Sir Robert Armstrong

Trident: Procedure

My minute of 12th February recorded (paragraph 9) provisional agreement with the Americans that there should be an interval of a very few days between (a) the Cabinet meeting here which approves the final D.5 deal and (b) the day on which the deal is publicly announced. The Defence Secretary has now had second thoughts about this. He intended to raise the point when he saw the Prime Minister on another matter this morning, but there was no time and he has therefore asked that the Cabinet Office should do so. It would be helpful to have an answer which I could be guided by in my second (and hopefully final) round of negotiating with the Americans in Washington on 24th and 25th February.

2. Mr Nott believes that, if there is any interval between (a) and (b), there will be a leak before we get to (b). He would therefore like them on the same day. That would follow the precedent of the C.4 deal, when we intended both events to occur on the same Thursday in July 1980 - though in the event a Washington leak forced us to advance the whole process by 48 hours and the Cabinet could only be informed in correspondence.

3. Having both (a) and (b) on the same day would somewhat awkwardly compress the time available for effecting the Exchange of Letters and informing the French and Germans. But such difficulties should be manageable. The real problem, as Mr Nott recognises, lies in the fact that the Cabinet could not fail to recognise that their consent had been taken for granted if they are only asked to give it on the day on which a clearly pre-arranged announcement is made in both London and Washington. There were complaints on this score last time. Mr Nott, who was the main complainant then, does not believe that there would be any similar resentment this time, given the care with which he is now in process of briefing all his Cabinet colleagues on the issues involved. But he recognises it is a matter for the Prime Minister's judgement.



4. Sir Robert Armstrong, whom I have consulted, would not expect discussion of this particular subject at a normal Thursday Cabinet meeting to leak before an announcement on (say) the following Tuesday. The paper focussing the discussion could be made available only inside the Cabinet Room, on a not-to-be-taken-away basis. In his view, a greater danger may be that (as last time) there will be a leak from Washington a day or two before the agreed announcement date. That would matter less if the Cabinet had already reached their decision (ie if the Cabinet had met a few days before the scheduled announcement) than if they were once again pre-empted.

5. Since I leave for the United States early tomorrow I should be most grateful if you could inform Mr Wright ~~(to whom I am copying this minute)~~ of the Prime Minister's decision. He will then inform the Defence Secretary, as well as letting me know in Washington.

22nd February 1982

R L WADE-GERY



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