



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

TELEPHONE 01-218 9000  
DIRECT DIALING 01-218 2111/3

SECRET UK EYES A

MO 18/1/1

PRIME MINISTER

BRITISH NUCLEAR TEST PROGRAMME

The previous Government authorised the preparations to be made for another British nuclear test to be fired in August this year. This test is a key part of our programme of warhead development for deterrent successor systems. The device is in the United States, the preparations are well advanced, and the time has come for us to give our final political clearance for this test.

2. If you agree, I propose to authorise the firing of this device. I would intend to follow the normal arrangements agreed with the Americans regarding publicity, ie to release the basic details of the event immediately after the test has been fired. This is done simultaneously in London and the United States. I would of course let you have the fuller results of the test as soon as these are available.

3. The possibility that a three year CTB Treaty may impede our warhead development programme has been present for some time. We are, of course, dependent on American goodwill in carrying out these British nuclear tests in Nevada; they require the President's political consent. The practical preparations for a test take at least nine months. If a limited duration CTBT is a reality it is not likely to begin until late 1980. Our warhead development programme, aimed at successor systems and modernisation of our tactical nuclear weapons, would require at least two more successful tests before a ban comes into effect. Making allowance for a possible test failure means that we should ask the American authorities to seek Presidential clearance for at least three further British nuclear tests in 1980. The Americans would wish to submit the British proposals, together with their own test plans to the President, as soon as possible.

4. Each test costs us about \$12M for the US assistance. The practical preparations are governed by the US range resources for drilling the necessary large and deep holes for the underground tests. If we are to be able to test in the mid 1980s then we must be

/prepared ...

SECRET UK EYES A



prepared to commit money to these tests so that the Americans can start the necessary preparations, which have to be dovetailed into their much larger programme. I propose, therefore, subject to your agreement, to ask the US authorities to proceed with preparations for two further British tests immediately and to leave the third reserve test decision until we have the results of this August test. I understand that this will fit in with the US requirements on test plans. These tests are so important that I am prepared to meet the costs from within whatever level of Defence cash provision may be finally agreed.

5. I am copying this minute to the Home Secretary, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Sir John Hunt.

*Handwritten initials: J.P.*

6th July 1979

SECRET UK EYES A



SECRET

Prime Minister

Agree?

Yes out.

BM  
10/7

Ref. A09935

PRIME MINISTER

British Nuclear Test Programme

In his minute to you of 6th July the Secretary of State for Defence seeks political clearance for another British nuclear test to take place in the United States in August; and for preparations to be begun for a further two or three more tests in 1980.

2. These tests are a necessary part of our warhead development programme. The August test is particularly important for the Chevaline (Polaris improvement) programme; but the fact that tests are taking place, the technically advanced devices which are being tested and the information which will be generated will all strengthen our hand in discussing with the Americans a strategic successor to Polaris and the modernisation of our theatre nuclear forces.

3. The Foreign Secretary is expected to take the view that the current position on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty negotiations need not inhibit us from carrying out this year's test; and that the prospects for 1980, while unclear, are not such as to make it unreasonable to begin preparations for further tests as proposed. The Chancellor of the Exchequer is likely to be satisfied by the Secretary of State for Defence's promise to meet the costs of the complete series of tests from within whatever level of defence cash provision is finally agreed.

4. Accordingly I recommend that you should give the Secretary of State for Defence the political clearance which he seeks. ✓

*John*

(John Hunt)

10th July, 1979



Defence

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DSG



five

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

13 July 1979

BRITISH NUCLEAR TEST PROGRAMME

The Prime Minister has seen and considered the Defence Secretary's minute (MO 18/1/1) of 6 July about the British nuclear test which is due to take place in August this year, in which Mr. Pym also set out his proposal to ask the U.S. authorities to proceed with preparations for two further British tests immediately.

Subject to the views of her colleagues, the Prime Minister agrees that Mr. Pym should proceed as he suggests.

I am sending copies of this letter to John Chilcot (Home Office), Paul Lever (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Martin Hall (HM Treasury) and Martin Vile (Cabinet Office).

B. G. CARTLEDGE

Roger Facer, Esq.,  
Ministry of Defence.

DSG



PM/79/66

PRIME MINISTERBritish Nuclear Test Programme

1. I agree generally with the Defence Secretary's minute MO/18/1/1 of 6 July.
2. As the Defence Secretary points out, a limited duration comprehensive test ban treaty is unlikely to become a reality until late 1980. It is however possible that testing could end earlier than that. The Americans and Russians both have an eye on the desirability of reaching agreement prior to the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in June 1980. It is too soon to say whether they are likely to stop testing as soon as the treaty has been initialled; or whether they would continue until the treaty has been ratified. In the latter case testing might continue for several months, possibly into 1981.
3. We would of course press hard for a timetable which met our requirements. (This is one factor in our general approach to the CTB negotiations on which I shall be consulting colleagues again shortly.) But if the US saw clear advantage in declaring a moratorium as soon as the treaty had been agreed among the three states, we would be unwise to assume that President Carter would be dissuaded on the grounds that we had a need to carry out further tests. Much would depend on the Americans' own testing programme. If they had completed their essential tests, the case for a moratorium would obviously be stronger in the President's eyes.
4. If, therefore, there is an essential requirement for two, or possibly three British tests in 1980, we should try to take advantage of any flexibility over timing to ensure that they take place as early in 1980 as technical arrangements allow.
5. I am sending copies of this minute to the Defence Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Home Secretary and Sir John Hunt.

C  
/

(CARRINGTON)

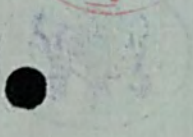
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

17 July 1979

*Defence* 2  
Prime Minister 20  
To note Lord Carrington's views. *See*

17/7  
P.A.  
SW  
10/7

17 JUL 1979





*Defence 21*

Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG  
01-233 3000

19 July 1979

*Mr Rogo,*

*P.A.  
G.M.  
19/7*

BRITISH NUCLEAR TEST PROGRAMME

The Chancellor has seen a copy of the Defence Secretary's minute of 6 July to the Prime Minister, as well as the letter of 13 July to you from the Prime Minister's Private Secretary, and Lord Carrington's minute of 17 July.

The Chancellor has no objection to further tests being arranged as proposed given the Defence Secretary's assurance that the costs will be met from within whatever level of Defence cash provision may be finally agreed.

I am copying this to the Private Secretaries to the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and Sir John Hunt.

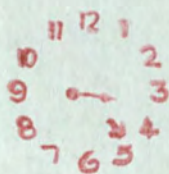
*Yours ever,  
M.A.*

(M. A. HALL)  
Private Secretary

R. L. L. Facer, Esq.,



19 JUL 1979



SECRET

UK EYES A

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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

TELEPHONE 01-218 9000  
DIRECT DIALING 01-218 2111/3

SECRET  
UK EYES A

Prime Minister

MO 18/1/1

*This seems conclusive.*

*SM  
27/7*

PRIME MINISTER

BRITISH NUCLEAR TEST PROGRAMME

In his minute of 17th July the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary suggests that we might accelerate our nuclear tests planned for 1980. I am afraid this is not feasible. These tests are large undertakings both in civil engineering and scientific terms. It takes 40 weeks to mount a test from a go ahead. In addition we can expect up to 8 weeks further delay while the US Government considers our request and before practical work can start, although we shall do all we can to reduce this time. Even so, the very best we can achieve is March 1980 for our first test and one or two months later for our second. It would be more realistic to assume a timetable two months later than this.

2. I am sending a copy to the Home Secretary, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Sir John Hunt.

*[Handwritten signature]*

26th July 1979

SECRET  
UK EYES A

SECRET UK EYES A



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2JH

TELEPHONE 0191 1000  
CABLES 0191 0000

26 JUL 1979



12th July 1979

12th July 1979

*Defence*

25



10 DOWNING STREET

CC HO  
FCO  
HMT  
CO

*From the Private Secretary*

28 July 1979

British Nuclear Test Programme

The Prime Minister has seen the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's minute (PM/79/66) of 17 July and the Defence Secretary's response, in his minute (MO 18/1/1) of 26 July, about the timing of the U.K. nuclear test programme.

The Prime Minister has taken note of Lord Carrington's comments but accepts that the considerations adduced in Mr. Pym's minute seem to rule out an acceleration of the nuclear tests planned for 1980.

I am sending copies of this letter to John Chilcot (Home Office), Paul Lever (F.C.O.), Martin Hall (Treasury) and Martin Vile (Cabinet Office).

**B. G. CARTLEDGE**

R. L. L. Facer, Esq.,  
Ministry of Defence.

GB