

MR. COLES

Prime Minister

②

A. J. C. $\frac{17.}{1}$

cc B1

NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND PUBLIC OPINION

1. I have seen a copy of the Foreign Secretary's note to the Prime Minister on this subject and think it contains excellent ideas. I have also seen a copy of the briefing for the Prime Minister for the LWT interview on 16 January (John Weston's minute of 11 January). The briefing seems fine, so far as it goes.

2. The Prime Minister might be interested in the following. During the six months of my retirement, I have been astonished at the preoccupation about the nuclear debate amongst a wide spectrum of personal friends of mine. These are not left wingers. They are sensible, middle of the road people who totally reject the unilateralist argument and also the craven suggestion that, while remaining in NATO, we should pass the buck of danger to the Italians and the Germans by refusing to accept the risk of having nuclear missiles based in the United Kingdom. These people are concerned about other questions, the following being the ones which have been most frequently directed at me:
 - i. Since it is the case that the Soviet Union have had SS20s deployed in large numbers for four or five years, thus creating a long and wide gap in deterrence between the two sides, why have they not already blackmailed the West with their possession of these weapons?

 - ii. We now have in the White House a President of lower intellectual calibre and less grasp of international issues than any incumbent since the Second World War. (This, in the view of my friends, lies at the heart of the recrudescence of the "peace debate" in this country and elsewhere.) This being so, we must have some kind of effective dual control over any American missiles which are sited in the United Kingdom.

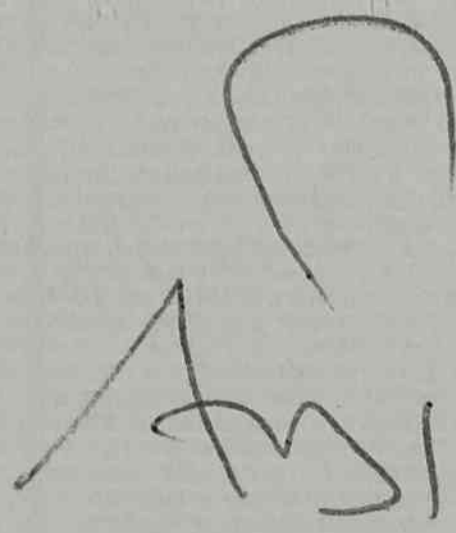
 - iii. How do we answer Lord Carver's argument (his book has sold well) about the independent nuclear deterrent?

/His contention

His contention which has carried most conviction is that an independent nuclear deterrent which is so small as not to constitute a credible first strike threat is useless. If the adversary knows that it cannot be used as a first strike weapon, he will discount it and will feel free to resort to conventional blackmail without running the risk of a nuclear exchange. Hence, we are maintaining an expensive weapon which has no deterrent value simply for political reasons. The money would be better spent on building up our conventional forces.

iv. If we are to have an independent nuclear deterrent, it must be fully independent. The French have achieved this but we have not. On the assumption that we would only need it if the Americans were to go into isolation or be otherwise stalemated by the Russians, how would we expect to have freedom of action when our missile system depends on American maintenance? Could they not turn the tap off at the crucial moment if they so wished, as industrialised powers have done in the past with Third World countries to whom they are principal conventional arms suppliers?

3. The above list of questions is not comprehensive. But they represent some of the main preoccupations of intelligent people who are potential or actual supporters of the Government. They are likely to crop up as the public debate develops.



13 January 1983

A.D. PARSONS