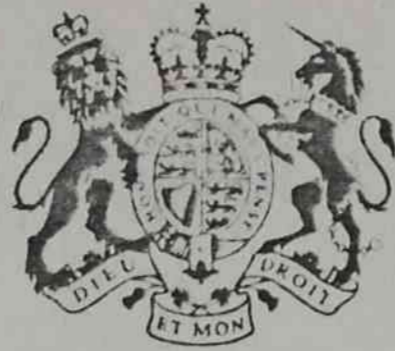


BJP



FILE

RW

ble: Sir A. Parsons  
Mr Ingham  
Miss Stephens.

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

17 January, 1983

① Mr. Coles ✓ A.S.C. 1/1  
14.30 - 15.30  
Monday 31st JAN  
② CF: To file

NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND PUBLIC OPINION

The Prime Minister was grateful for the minutes of 7 and 13 January by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary on this subject. She has also seen the minute of 12 January by the Secretary of State for Defence.

Mrs Thatcher agrees that it is desirable to hold an early meeting under her chairmanship to discuss these questions. We shall be in touch separately about the timing but the Prime Minister would be grateful if, in addition to Mr Pym, the Secretary of State for Defence, Mr Parkinson and Sir Robert Armstrong would attend. Sir Anthony Parsons and Mr Ingham will also be present.

The Prime Minister made no comment on the substance of Mr. Pym's minutes, except to express doubt about the wisdom of a round-table conference in the spring, including a number of representatives of the churches.

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence), Alex Galloway (Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's Office) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office):

A. J. COLES

R. Bone, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

PRIME MINISTER

①

NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND BRITISH PUBLIC  
OPINION

I attach two minutes by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, a brief comment by the Defence Secretary and a minute by Sir Anthony Parsons.

---

I am sure that the time has come to re-organise our machinery for handling public opinion on the nuclear weapons debate. Some efforts have been made in the past but they have not been sufficiently effective. In particular, we are in some danger of losing the argument with public opinion about the deployment of Cruise.

The Foreign Secretary proposes an early meeting under your chairmanship, attended by the Defence Secretary and the Chairman of the Party, to take decisions on the machinery for handling these matters. I suggest that Sir Robert Armstrong, Sir Anthony Parsons and Bernard Ingham should also attend.

---

Agree that we set up an early meeting on these lines?

A.S.C.      Yes

14 January, 1983



PM/83/4

PRIME MINISTER

Nuclear Weapons and Public Opinion

1. In my minute of 7 January I undertook to let you have suggestions about the organisation of a special unit in the Cabinet Office designed to improve our efforts to get across to the public at large the Government's approach.
2. I should like to propose an arrangement on the following lines:
  - (a) a group of senior Ministers, under your chairmanship, should take overall charge of this operation. You will want to consider which colleagues should attend. In my view we should include MISC 7 colleagues as well as Cecil Parkinson;
  - (b) for operational day to day supervision, I think we need a smaller Ministerial team, perhaps under Cecil Parkinson's chairmanship. Subject to your views I think this might subsume the existing steering group run by Douglas Hurd and Peter Blaker and which includes Patrick Mayhew from the Home Office. This team might report to the senior Ministerial group from time to time as appropriate.
  - (c) in support of the smaller Ministerial team we might establish a special unit of officials in the Cabinet Office. This would be tasked with keeping under constant review the main topics of current interest; with monitoring public opinion through regular polling; organising the preparation of papers, pamphlets and lines of argument in support of the Government's case; ensuring the distribution of documents, via existing channels in the FCO and MOD, to appropriate non-governmental organisations, to the COI, the Churches and, via the party organisation, to the constituencies. It would also have to ensure that our backbenchers receive a regular supply of up-to-date briefing on topical aspects of the debate. In my view



the special support unit should not supplant the existing arrangements for press handling in No 10 in the FCO or MOD; these should continue to be the main channel of communication. But the unit would have to ensure a thorough co-ordination of the Government line at all levels under the supervision of the Ministerial team.

(d) as I mentioned to you, as head of the unit or working very closely with it, I would envisage a senior figure with experience both of the Whitehall machine and of handling the media, who would be able to devote virtually the whole of his time to the task. One possibility which occurs to me is Sir D Maitland.

3. I understand that Cecil Parkinson intends to speak to you on the subject in the near future. I believe his ideas are very similar to my own.

4. I am sending copies of this minute to Michael Heseltine and Cecil Parkinson, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

(FRANCIS PYM)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

13 January, 1983

MR. COLES

Prime Minister

②

A.J.C. 17.  
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cc B1

NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND PUBLIC OPINION

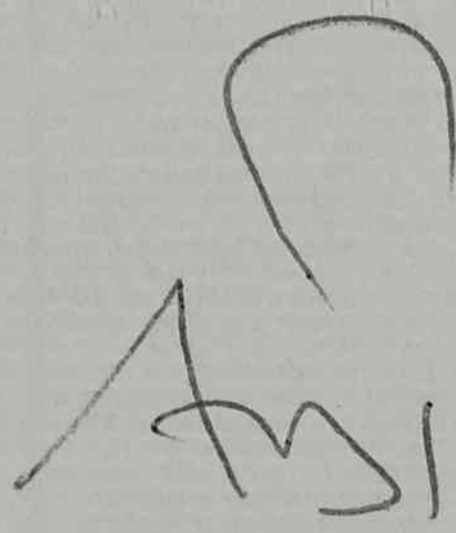
1. I have seen a copy of the Foreign Secretary's note to the Prime Minister on this subject and think it contains excellent ideas. I have also seen a copy of the briefing for the Prime Minister for the LWT interview on 16 January (John Weston's minute of 11 January). The briefing seems fine, so far as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



MO 18/1/2

PRIME MINISTERNUCLEAR WEAPONS AND PUBLIC OPINION

I read with interest the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's minute to you of 7th January about nuclear weapons and public opinion.

2. I agree with him that 1983 will be a crucial year and I am already looking at what more needs to be done in this area. A good deal of action is of course already in hand including in some of the areas referred to by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary. I support many of his ideas, though I have reservations on some. Rather than detail them now could I strongly support his suggestion of a meeting - it would be very helpful for me if this could be held soon.

Ministry of Defence  
12th January 1983

O/R

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL



PM 83/1

PRIME MINISTER

Nuclear Weapons and Public Opinion

1. 1983 will be a crucial year in this debate. Following the useful work of the Liaison Office and Peter Blaker's two recent letters to you, I thought it would be useful to set out some of our own ideas for improving the Government's efforts.

2. We have been active, but our efforts have not matched the impact made by the opposition in its different manifestations e.g. the Greenham Common women or the Bishop of Salisbury's booklet. If the Government effort is too low key the parallel Party effort may sometimes run the risk of being in the wrong key. An energetic and outright attack on the peace movements heartens the faithful, but it does little to persuade the doubters that the Government is seriously working for a more secure peace through negotiated agreement. Thousands of people are coming into active politics for the first time through the peace movements.

3. The risk is two-fold:

- (a) the development of a mass movement of demonstrations and civil disobedience against Cruise in 1983 so widespread and powerful that deployment would actually become difficult or even impossible. I still would not rate this possibility very highly, but it is less inconceivable than it was six months ago;

/(b)

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL





- (b) an intensification of public opinion against nuclear weapons so strong that large numbers determine their vote on this issue in favour of the Labour or Liberal Parties at the general election.

So both medium and message are crucial. I think our efforts need to concentrate sensitively and in simple terms on the primary issues rather than on the technicalities, namely peace, protection and realism. As to the mechanics for putting this across, I would suggest the following actions in addition to the work now in hand:

- (a) a small special unit in the Cabinet Office working to a small team of Ministers including the Chairman of the Party to inspire and direct the presentation of policy. I shall let you have shortly some more detailed suggestions about organisation;

- (b) a Round Table Conference in the spring which you yourself might chair including the Archbishops, the Cardinal, the Moderator, etc;

- (c) a series of rallies organised by the Party in each main city, to which representatives of the peace groups would be invited as well as our own folk, each to be addressed by a Minister. Each of these meetings should be linked to a special effort with the local media;

/(d)

Ford - 1  
would have thought



- (d) a special effort at and near Greenham Common e.g. a canvass by MPs, or one of us might address a meeting in Newbury.
- (e) an effort directed at making US servicemen here feel welcome e.g. a party at No 10.
- (f) a further Foreign Office pamphlet which would issue in my name.
- (g) a two-day debate in the Commons on Cruise ending in a vote on a motion approving the Government's policy.
- (h) if the Continental position on INF deployment holds, a joint declaration by the European governments (i.e. including us, excluding the Americans) explaining how deployment fits with our strategy for peace.
- (i) I have not specifically mentioned the Synod of the Church of England in February. This will be very important but open lobbying may produce the wrong result. We need to be sure that the Archbishops and the Bishop of London have the material they need.
- (j) last, but certainly not least, we need to find ways of making more impact on television which is devoting so much time to the other side.



4. No doubt there are other ideas. The above are concerned with imaginative presentation. They are not a substitute for sound policy to get us through 1983, which I think needs to include:

(i) some progress on a better definition of joint decision-taking on the US nuclear bases here.

(ii) a deft US response to Soviet ploys including a readiness at the right time to negotiate something other than the zero option.

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not new?

5. I should welcome the chance to discuss these ideas further with you and with Michael Heseltine and Cecil Parkinson, to whom I am copying this minute.

*Amend*

*FP*

(FRANCIS PYM)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

7 January 1983