



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

17 January 1983

RM

c.fo

~~CF~~

Dear Mr Owen,

Thank you for your further letter of 22 December, about cruise missile deployments in Britain.

Cruise missiles, should they be deployed here, will certainly represent a change in the American nuclear forces based in Britain since we have not hosted US land-based missiles for some years. But the part they play in the strategy of deterrence and their capacity to prevent the Russians threatening NATO from a Soviet sanctuary will be similar to that of the F-111 aircraft which have been based here for many years. Our aim, I believe, must be to generate the same public confidence in the Anglo/US arrangements covering the cruise missiles and their bases as has long existed for the F-111 bases and indeed the bases of other US nuclear forces in this country.

You contrast the arrangements foreseen for cruise missiles with those governing the Lance missile system. The case of Lance is rather different, not because it is deployed in central Europe, but because we chose to purchase the missiles and their launchers, as have the other European allies who operate this short-range missile system. As you know, the option to purchase cruise missiles and their launchers (but not warheads), which would have given us physical control, was one which we decided against in 1979. I do not think that you yourself took a different view on this point at the time.

/I cannot

JCP

I cannot accept your charge that the decision to base cruise missiles here has not been fully debated in the House. Subsequent to the debate in January 1980 we have had three debates on nuclear defence issues and following the last one, on 15 December, the vote again endorsed Government policy. The NATO Alliance has taken its decision. We must now show firmness in implementing this decision, both in respect of deployment and in negotiation at Geneva, if the Russians are to be brought to abandon their present unreasonable position. Nevertheless, I fully agree that Parliament should continue to have the proper opportunity to express itself on these important matters and I intend to ensure that this is so.

As for negotiations, the 'zero option' remains far and away the best goal for the negotiations. But we have all along made it clear that we shall listen to and consider very carefully serious Soviet counter-proposals. Secondly, the deployment programme is far from irreversible. Even if the first deployments do have to take place at the end of this year, the five year programme for the basing of cruise and Pershing II missiles in Western Europe could be stopped, changed or reversed at any time if agreement at Geneva permitted it.

Yours sincerely  
Raymond Hester

The Rt Hon. Dr. David Owen, M.P.,





Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

10 January 1983

*PS*  
*R* *cc:IG*  
*Amendment made. AR 14/6.*  
*Mr Coles: any comments?*

*John Helling*, *2 GR: Please type WR 11/1*

Thank you for your letter of 23 December enclosing one from Dr Owen of 22 December continuing his correspondence with the Prime Minister about the control of cruise missiles and the need for Parliament to make its views known.

I enclose a draft reply which has been agreed with the Ministry of Defence.

*John Helling*  
*John Helling*

(R B Bone)  
Private Secretary

W Rickett Esq  
10 Downing Street

Defence :- Nuclear Release Procedure

DRAFT: minute/letter/teleletter/despatch/note

TYPE: Draft/Final 1+

FROM:

Reference

The Prime Minister

DEPARTMENT:

TEL. NO:

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION

TO:

Your Reference

- Top Secret
- Secret
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- Restricted
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The Rt Hon Dr David Owen MP  
 House of Commons  
 LONDON SW1A 0AA

Copies to:

PRIVACY MARKING

SUBJECT:

.....In Confidence

Thank you for your further letter, of 22 December, about cruise missile deployments in Britain.

CAVEAT.....

Cruise missiles, should they be deployed here, will certainly represent a change in the American nuclear forces based in Britain <sup>since</sup> ~~inasmuch as~~ we have not ~~been~~ <sup>hosted</sup> ~~host to~~ US land-based missiles for some years. But <sup>part they play in the strategy</sup> ~~their role in the spectrum~~ of deterrence and their capacity to prevent the Russians threatening NATO from a Soviet sanctuary will be <sup>similar to that of</sup> ~~the same as has characterised~~ the F-111 aircraft <sup>which have been</sup> ~~based~~ here for many years. Our aim, I believe, must be to generate the same public confidence in the Anglo/US arrangements covering the cruise missiles and their bases as has long existed for the F-111 bases and indeed <sup>the bases of</sup> ~~other~~ US nuclear forces ~~bases~~ in this country.

Enclosures—flag(s).....

You contrast the arrangements foreseen for cruise missiles with those governing the Lance missile system. The case of Lance is rather different, not because it is deployed in central Europe, but because /we

we chose to purchase the missiles and their launchers, as have <sup>the</sup> other European allies who operate this short-range missile system. As you know, the option to purchase cruise missiles and their launchers (but not warheads), which would have given us physical control, was one which we decided against in 1979. I do not think that you yourself took a different view on this point at the time.

I cannot accept your charge that the decision to base cruise missiles here has not been fully debated in the House. Subsequent to the debate in January 1980 we have had three debates on nuclear defence issues and following the last one, on 15 December, the vote again endorsed Government policy. The <sup>NATO</sup> Alliance has taken its decision. We must now show firmness in implementing this decision, both in respect of deployment and in negotiation at Geneva, if the Russians are to be brought to abandon their present unreasonable position. Nevertheless, I fully agree that Parliament should continue to have the proper opportunity to express itself on these important <sup>matters</sup> ~~motions~~ and I intend to ensure that this is so.

As for negotiations, ~~we are well conscious of the need for flexibility.~~ Although the 'zero option' remains far and away the best goal for the negotiations, <sup>but</sup> we have all along made it clear that we shall listen to and consider very carefully serious Soviet counter-proposals. Secondly, the deployment programme is far from irreversible. Even if the first deployments do have to take place, at the end of this year, the five year programme /for

- 3 -

for the basing of cruise and Pershing II missiles in Western Europe could be stopped, changed or reversed at any time if agreement at Geneva permitted it.

AR 14/11.



10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

23 December 1982

You will have received a copy of the letter that the Prime Minister sent to Dr. Owen on 21 December in reply to his letter of 8 December about the control of cruise missiles, and the question of a further Parliamentary debate on nuclear weapons.

I now attach a further letter from Dr Owen, in which he argues once more that a dual key system for cruise missiles, and a further Parliamentary debate, are necessary if we wish to retain public confidence. I should be grateful if you could provide a draft reply for the Prime Minister's signature, to reach me by Monday 10 January.

I am copying this letter and enclosure to Richard Mottram (MOD) and David Heyhoe (Lord President's Office).

W. F. S. RICKETT

Roger Bone, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

DB





10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

23 December 1982

I am writing on behalf of the Prime Minister to thank you for your further letter of 22 December.

I shall of course place this before her and a reply will be sent to you as soon as possible.

W. F. S. RICKETT

The Rt. Hon. Dr David Owen, MP.

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10 DOWNING STREET

PRIME MINISTER

David Owen argues once more that a dual key system for cruise missiles, and a further Parliamentary debate, are necessary if we wish to retain public confidence.

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We will let you have a draft reply.

cm

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23 December 1982

From: The Rt Hon Dr David Owen MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

22 December 1982

*JOS*

The Rt Hon Mrs Margaret Thatcher MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London SW1

*See page 10/11*

*attached*

*gr.*

*This is not now attached.  
Pl. link up. Kay 18/1*

Thank you for your letter. In as much as you appear not to have totally closed the door on either of the two suggestions I put to you, I am relieved. But I hope you will take the opportunity of the Christmas Recess to think a little more deeply over your reply. No where in your letter do you recognise that a decision to deploy Cruise missiles in Britain, which I hope will not be necessary, would represent a considerable change in the US nuclear presence in the UK. I reminded you of the precedent that had been established over Thor missiles and we agreed about the arrangements which operated at that time. The different arrangements for other systems to which you refer have, of course, never applied to land-based missile systems and the arrangements operating when I was Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, to which you also refer, covered in the main American aircraft based in the UK and capable of carrying nuclear weapons. But even during my time in office the Lance missile system - admittedly deployed in Central Europe - but used by BAOR was operated under an electronically controlled dual key arrangement.

I have never given any credence to the belief that we would not have any part in the decision-making process in relation to Cruise missiles and all my public statements have made this clear, but I think you underrate the extent to which it is necessary in order to retain public confidence to apply the same arrangements for the control of any future US missile systems as was done in the past when Mr Harold Macmillan was Prime Minister.

As to the debate and vote in the House of Commons when the outcome of the INF negotiations are known late in 1983, your suggestion that this could be covered by a debate on the Defence Estimates in the Spring totally misses the point. You also quote the January 1980 debate. I might point out that that was on the Adjournment of the House on which only 52 Members voted against and the Official Opposition party abstained. At that time and still to this day I believe there was a majority in the House of Commons for the twin-track decision but that should not be taken as giving you and your Government a carte blanche to deploy Cruise missiles if you happen to

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feel unsatisfied with the Soviet response in the negotiations. Of course, if there has not been an Election and you are still in Government at the time you will want to come to the House with a recommendation but to deprive Parliament of the right to make the decision is, in my view, totally wrong on an issue of such importance. Again, I believe it is necessary to give this commitment in order to retain public confidence. /

Mr Andropov in his speech outlining a Soviet initiative in the INF talks has started a process of public debate on the reasonableness or unreasonableness of the Soviet negotiating position that is likely to continue throughout most of 1983. During this process of negotiation it will be necessary for NATO to hold its unity and to negotiate toughly though I hope also constructively. If the public knows that it is not necessary to take a committed position during the negotiating process and if Parliament knows this, there is much less likelihood of the NATO negotiating position being undermined. The tradition, as you well know, of negotiations whether involving domestic or international matters is for Parliament to hold its hand and await the outcome of the negotiations before making a final decision.

I hope, on reflection, that you will see the wisdom of such a course and make the necessary commitment which I think will be widely welcomed both by MPs of all parties and the broad span of opinion in the country that wants nuclear arms reductions but also wants to ensure that we do nothing to put at risk the proper defence of our country and that of our friends and allies.

*Yours sincerely*  
*David Owen*

David Owen