



1 *W.P. [unclear]*  
 2 *RTA*  
*I am mainly  
 RTA. This looks to  
 be a bit of a right line.*

Ref. A086/2184

MR WICKS

The Government's Response to the Reports of the Select  
 Committee on Defence about Westland plc

*W.W.*  
*31.7*

*F.*

I have discussed the handling of the response with the Permanent Secretaries to the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Trade and Industry.

2. The background to this is that the problems of Westland plc are not going to diminish in the coming months, particularly if the Ministry of Defence (as seems likely) are obliged to reduce their orders for Sea King Helicopters. The Select Committee are therefore likely to want to come back to the defence and industrial implications of Westland plc in the coming months.
3. The response to the Select Committee's report on the defence implications will have to be prepared with these considerations in mind.
4. The response to the report on the Government's decision-making will, I think, need to be a different sort of document. I hope that it will be possible so to construct it as to avoid retelling the story of the events discussed in the Select Committee's report: all concerned will want to minimise the risks of another round of evidence-taking and reports. It will need to deal further with the questions of accountability and of the role of civil servants in relation to Select Committees (and vice versa).
5. With these considerations in mind we have agreed to work on the preparation of two separate responses to the two Select Committee reports. The Ministry of Defence will take primary responsibility, in consultation with the Department of Trade and Industry, for preparing the response on defence implications; the Cabinet Office, in consultation with the other Departments concerned, will take primary responsibility for the preparation of a response on decision-making.



6. We aim to prepare drafts and discuss them among ourselves early in September, with a view to getting drafts to the Ministers concerned in time for publication not later than the end of September. I am conscious of the fact that there will be something to be said for publishing the responses either a little earlier than that - so as to keep them clear of party conferences - or a little later than that, so that the responses do not appear until after the party conferences of the opposition parties.

7. I think that the response on the defence implications should be presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Defence. If the response on decision-taking is separate, I fear that it will be difficult to avoid the conclusion that it should be presented by the Prime Minister, though it could perhaps be presented by the Prime Minister and the two Secretaries of State jointly.

8. The Lord Privy Seal and the Chief Whip will no doubt have their own views on the arrangements for debating the response. I would judge that a debate would be inevitable; and that the Government should therefore aim to have one debate for the responses to both reports, and to have it during the spill-over rather than in a new Session.

9. I am sending copies of this minute to the Private Secretaries to the Lord President, the Lord Privy Seal and the Chief Whip.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

29 July 1986