

17th December, 1986

Prime Minister

Dear Margaret,

This is Lord Weinstock's last throw. One could say that he should have put these resources at the disposal of the Nimrod programme long ago. CBP 17/12/86

I don't know whether our talk yesterday evening did the slightest good in my cause, but I did feel a good deal better at the end of it.

Further reflection and news coming in this morning to the office prompt me to write again to you before the fatal hour arrives.

As you know, we have been genuinely mystified by what we heard about the assessment, and how devastating it was said to be about Nimrod. We now understand that it accepts that GEC Avionics have made great progress in the months since they took control, as of course do George Younger and David Trefgarne. I gather the main problem is the doubts as to our ability to complete on time. As you know, our tender is framed in such a way that we could lose perhaps £200 million or more if we fail to deliver. This is an indication of our confidence that we would not be late.

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It appears, however, that our acceptance of even this huge risk gives you insufficient reassurance that we will do what is needed when it is needed. Let me therefore try to reinforce the commitment we have already made with further steps that we will take. And I must add that whatever we do will not divert resources from other MOD contracts.

(i) We will place at the disposal of GEC Avionics as a first priority the whole of the resources of the Hirst Research Centre and the Marconi Great Baddow Research laboratories;

(ii) we will place GEC Computers Ltd., which is on the same site as GEC Avionics at Borehamwood, under the direct control of GEC Avionics to complete the development of the multi-processor system and to render such other assistance as might be useful to Nimrod;

(iii) the fact is that we have sufficient engineers to do the job, but what could be helpful is an infusion of high-grade managerial people.

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Therefore, to make assurance doubly sure, we will recruit in the United States six high grade technical managers with commensurate engineering qualifications and a minimum of ten years' experience in the aviation field. We can achieve this quite quickly through our existing organisation in Atlanta, and I have no doubt that Lockheed will help if necessary. To make sure we get them, we are prepared to pay an extravagant price; on the basis of three-year contracts, for which we would make a commitment, this might cost us between £5 and £6 million, but even if we have to pay twice as much, we are prepared to do it, and to do it now.

I suggested to you last night that you should allow us a further two weeks beyond the end of the current contract (31st December), during which MOD would have no cost liability, before a decision is made. After all, we are still flying trials for the French and Lockheed. In this short extra period, our people could, with MOD and other acceptable professionals, have

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a further look, consult together and advise. If, after this period, the view was taken that there was an unacceptable risk that we could not fulfil the requirement, we would at least both be able to say that every effort had been made.

I have always felt that you and your colleagues would want the Nimrod solution if they could be sure that it will work, and I still believe that. Can we not make one last great effort to save this project for British industry?

Yours,
Arnold

Lord Weinstock

P.S. As there is so little time, I am copying this letter to George Younger, who was present yesterday evening, to Willie Whitelaw, as Leader of the House of Lords, and to Nigel Lawson, as Chancellor.

The Rt. Hon. Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, MP,
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LONDON, S.W.1.