

CONFIDENTIAL

Prime Minister

May I tell Sir Robert

and Sir Clive that you agree to

X1? (Nobody thinks that the Minister is responsible but Clive wants

to demonstrate how seriously his inquiry is being taken).



PERMANENT UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE
SIR CLIVE WHITMORE KCB CVO

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

Telephone 01-218 2193 (Direct Dialling)

01-218 9000 (Switchboard)

24th October, 1983.

PUS/83/984

ERB

25.10

Yes
ms

Dear Robert,

LEAK INQUIRY: CRUISE MISSILES

You will have seen from last Saturday's issue and today's that the Guardian has published detailed information about the delivery of cruise missiles at Greenham Common and the arrangements for their security on arrival.

2. It is quite clear that the newspaper got its story as a result of a comprehensive leak of classified plans. Much of the information published in the Guardian covers the same ground as the contents of the two minutes, both classified Secret, which my Secretary of State sent to the Prime Minister last Friday (though dated 20th October). One of those minutes was about the delivery of the missiles and the accompanying security arrangements and was copied to the Home Secretary, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Attorney General, and you. The other dealt with the Parliamentary and public handling of the arrival of the missiles and was copied to the Lord President, the Lord Privy Seal and the Chief Whip, as well as to the Home Secretary, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and you. We do not, however, believe that the Guardian has had a copy of either minute in its possession.

3. In these circumstances I recommend that a full investigation under the leak procedure should be set in hand at once. As several Departments were included in the circulation of Mr. Heseltine's two minutes, I think that it would be appropriate in this case for someone from the central panel of investigators to be appointed to take charge of the inquiry, and I should be glad if you would let me know whom you propose. The Defence Secretary feels that it would be right for the investigation to embrace Ministers as well as officials, and I should be grateful if Robin Butler, to whom I am sending a copy of this letter, could seek the approval of the Prime Minister for this course.

4. May I suggest that in the meantime Departments begin to trace straight away the handling of Mr. Heseltine's minutes during the course of Friday, 21st October.

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5. I am sending copies of this letter to Brian Cubbon (Home Office), Antony Acland (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Janet Lewis-Jones (Lord President's office), David Heyhoe (Lord Privy Seal's office), Jim Nursaw (Law Officers' Department), Murdo MacLean (Chief Whip's office) and the Director General of the Security Service.

Yours sincerely,

Shirley

Sir Robert Armstrong, GCB, CVO,
Cabinet Office,
70 Whitehall,
London, SW1A 2AS.

Troops stand by for the Greenham missile date

Whitehall sets November 1 cruise arrival

By David Fairhall,
Defence Correspondent

The first American nuclear cruise missiles are scheduled to arrive at Greenham Common in Berkshire on November 1 with their atomic warheads.

They will arrive by air, to be followed on present secret plans over the next seven days by further deliveries of launch vehicles and other operational equipment. The British and US governments are evidently prepared to go ahead with the deliveries in spite of the possibility that Soviet negotiators at the Geneva arms control talks may use the missiles' arrival as a public excuse to walk out.

But a three-week postponement is still being considered in Whitehall, presumably to give the German Bundestag time to debate the controversial Nato nuclear modernisation programme of which the ground-launched cruise missiles at Greenham Common form part, along with Pershing II ballistic missiles in West Germany.

If the missiles are coming on November 1 — and in the light of this report the timetable is almost certain to be called into question again in Whitehall — security at the Berkshire base will be massively strengthened, initially by Ministry of Defence police and members of the RAF Regiment, but if necessary also

EXCLUSIVE

by several battalions of British soldiers.

This is not only to prevent members of the women's peace camp cutting through the perimeter wire to demonstrate against the American weapons' arrival but also to ensure that armed US Air Force troops guarding the missiles are not provoked into opening fire under the strict rules of engagement which the American military authorities apply to the protection of their nuclear equipment.

If the anti-nuclear demonstrations do lead to violence it is considered politically vital to keep the Americans as far away from it as possible.

The Defence Minister, Mr Michael Heseltine, is believed to have advised the Prime Minister that, since the missiles' arrival, accompanied by 50ft-long articulated launch vehicles, can hardly be disguised from the women camped outside the airbase gates the Government's best course is to make an immediate public announcement on the same day in the House of Commons.

This can then be followed by a Ministry of Defence press conference to explain and justify the Government's support for Nato's nuclear programme before the parliamen-

tary opposition or the campaign for nuclear disarmament can get their word in.

Mr Heseltine is bound also to emphasise that the cruise missiles arrival in this country does not mean that they are operational. The first flight of 16 missiles forming part of the USAF's 501st Tactical Missile Wing is not scheduled to declare its "initial operating capability" until the end of December, so there is still time for the operational deployment to be cancelled if there is a last-minute breakthrough in the Geneva talks.

Even beyond that, the deployment could be limited to fewer than 96 missiles allocated to Greenham Common if an agreement to this effect were reached with the Soviet Union. The complete UK force planned for the UK consists of 160 missiles, but some of these will be based at Molesworth, near Huntingdon, where the base will not be ready to accept them until the late 1980s.

A spokesman for the Ministry of Defence said last night: "We have nothing to add to what we have previously announced about the planned deployment by the end of the year."

However, the fact that the plan has now leaked out must force the Government security services to a hasty review of their delivery timetable in consultation with the US Air Force, particularly since atomic warheads are involved.

Extract from The Guardian 22/10/83.

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

File
cc: Sir Clive Whitmore
Sir Brian Cutler (HO)
Sir A. Acland (Fro)
LPSO
LPO
LDD
CW&O
D-G, Security
Services

Leak Inquiry: Cruise Missiles

I am writing to confirm that the Prime Minister would be content for the leak investigation into the release to The Guardian of information about the delivery of Cruise missiles at Greenham Common and arrangements for their security to be extended to Ministers as well as officials.

I am copying this letter to Sir Clive Whitmore and those who received copies of his letter of 24 October.

26 October, 1983

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Handwritten notes:
D-G
L-5
U
M
D-G Sec

Handwritten initials: JSG

Government orders cruise leak inquiry

By Julia Langdon
and David Fairhall

An official inquiry into the leak of plans to bring the first nuclear cruise missiles into Britain on November 1 is being set up by the Government.

Publication of the missiles' delivery timetable in Saturday's Guardian is regarded in official circles as distinctly unhelpful, and will be an embarrassment to Mrs Thatcher when she faces her first question time of the resumed parliamentary session at Westminster today.

The Prime Minister is expected to be pressed to confirm the dates and deployment details revealed in the report — and whether these plans will now be changed to foil protests by the women's peace camp outside the gates of the US Air Force base at Greenham Common, in Berkshire,

that will house the new weapons.

She is also likely to be questioned about the implications of the Government's defence policy over the coming months, and the British approach to the current round of negotiations in Geneva on nuclear arms reduction.

Had the plans not been leaked, Mrs Thatcher had been advised to stall any parliamentary questions by merely repeating that the "necessary preparations" were proceeding at Greenham Common to achieve Nato's target of having the first flight of 16 missiles operational by the end of the year.

But when the missiles and their nuclear warheads were to be flown in on November 1, the Defence Secretary, Mr Michael Heseltine, was planning an announcement in the Commons and at a press con-

ference because evasion would, by then, be counterproductive.

His aim was to get in before the Opposition or the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament with his and the Government's justification of the deployment — emphasising that the missiles were not yet operational lest their arrival should be used by the Russians as a pretext to walk out of the Geneva talks.

Only if the missiles themselves were held back for another three weeks — presumably to give the German Bundestag time to debate the issue — would he have adopted the passive stance of merely answering questions. These were bound to arise when the Greenham women reported seeing 50-foot long launch vehicles emerging from the holds of US Galaxy transports.

The minister would also have reckoned to make use of the reductions in shorter range battlefield nuclear weapons that will be agreed at this week's meeting in Ottawa of Nato's nuclear planning group, which Mr Heseltine will attend.

The Government is acutely aware of the sensitivity of this subject. For that reason the inquiry into the leak will presumably be more than what is nowadays wearily regarded as a "routine" investigation of a breach of security. The timing seems crucial, since the information was made available on the eve of Saturday's mass CND rally in London.

EXTRACT FROM THE GUARDIAN

25 OCTOBER 1983

The Government nevertheless maintains it has won the propaganda war, discounting the turnout at the rally as irrelevant. It is suggested that government policy in the deployment of cruise missiles has been settled for some months now, so there is no change — unless prompted by reasons of security — which should require particular public attention at this stage.

While it is acknowledged that there could be a debate on the outcome of the Geneva talks — where Nato's cruise and Pershing II deployments are being negotiated primarily against the Soviet Union's SS-20s — it is pointed out that Mrs Thatcher has continually asserted that the chances of success there are negligible. For this reason, it is claimed, there is no particular need for a Commons debate about the specific issues of stinging the missiles in Britain.

Press leak may affect cruise arrival date

By David Fairhall
Defence Correspondent

Ministry of Defence officials meet this morning to decide whether to call for a change in the US Air Force plan to deploy the first nuclear cruise missiles at Greenham Common on November 1, now that the women camped in protest outside the gates of the Berkshire base are aware of the date.

Details of the delivery timetable — starting with the atomic warheads on the first aircraft so as to have them safely stored in underground bunkers before any demonstrations begin and continuing with launch vehicles and other operational equipment through to November 8 — were published exclusively

in later editions of the Guardian on Saturday.

From a security point of view, if the women demonstrators were considered a threat, the obvious response would be to change the dates. But this may not be easy. The Defence Secretary, Mr Michael Heseltine, who will want to make the first public announcement of the missiles' arrival, is away in Canada at a NATO nuclear planning group meeting — which will need to be briefed on the cruise missile deployment — until next Saturday.

Any substantial postponement, on the other hand, might cause difficulties for the USAF's 501st Tactical Missile Wing, which has been asked to demonstrate an "initial operating capability" with the first

flight of 16 missiles before the end of December.

A possible delay of three weeks has been allowed for the delivery of the missiles themselves—though not their conspicuous 50ft launch vehicles—apparently to give time for the

Million march for peace, page 5; Terry Coleman, page 11; 400,000 at Hyde Park, back page.

German Bundestag to debate Nato's controversial nuclear modernisation programme, which also includes the deployment of Pershing II ballistic missiles in West Germany.

What has not been allowed for in the US-British timetable, or so it seems, is the danger

that the Russians will use the weapons' arrival in Berkshire as an excuse to walk out of the Geneva talks where their numbers are under negotiation. The two governments have evidently taken the view that since the chances of a real breakthrough in the talks before Christmas is remote, that risk is worth taking.

Sooner or later, warheads and missiles must be brought in, if the initial operating capability is to have any military meaning as a deterrent before the end of the year. Mr Heseltine will no doubt emphasise to the British public that installing them in the Greenham silos does not mean that they are operational.

A key factor in deciding whether to change the plan is

the extent to which the weapons' physical security—and especially that of the 200 kiloton W-84 atomic warheads—can be guaranteed however many "Greenham Women Against Cruise" turn up to swell the protests of the 40 or so permanently camped outside the perimeter wire.

The most serious danger, as seen from Whitehall, is that some of the women might break through to confront the armed US troops escorting the warheads from aircraft to bunkers—probably with orders to fire on anyone who interferes with them. To avoid this possibility, however remote, armed British troops will be placed between the Americans and the outer cordons of RAF

Turn to back page, col. 2

Leak may affect date for cruise

Continued from page one

Regiment guards and Ministry of Defence police. Up to four battalions of soldiers will be on call if necessary.

One surprising feature of the plan as disclosed to the Guardian—and not yet officially confirmed by the Ministry of Defence or the USAF—is that the warheads are being flown in with the first missiles, rather than being brought over separately from the US, perhaps by sea and then taken discreetly into one of the Berkshire base's secondary gates.

People living on the southern outskirts of Newbury under the approach to the main Greenham runway may be particularly concerned. Multiple safety catches should ensure that there is absolutely no possibility of a nuclear explosion, even if the warheads have a malfunction that a crash would obviously carry the risk of contaminating the area with highly radioactive material.

In the end Mr Heseltine may decide, if he believes his own speeches about having won the nuclear debate, that now the plan is out in the open the best policy is to press ahead with it. Nuclear deterrence is a function of credibility.

On the domestic political front, neither Mr Heseltine nor Mrs Thatcher will be pleased to be faced with such a difficult choice when they and the security forces had hoped to take the Greenham peace camp by surprise. The Prime Minister was warned by officials about the Guardian's disclosure before Saturday's edition went on sale and Downing Street indicated last night that an immediate investigation to find the source of the leak was expected.

Extract from The Guardian 24/10/83