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 R. Minister
 Some points of
 interest.

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14th December 1987

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NUCLEAR MATTERS: NOTE FOR THE RECORD OF THE
 DEFENCE SECRETARY'S MEETING IN RESTRICTED SESSION WITH THE FRENCH
 DEFENCE MINISTER, 14TH DECEMBER 1987

1. The Defence Secretary's meeting on nuclear matters with M. Giraud lasted 45 minutes. CDS, DCSA (for the ASMP item), DUS(P), and D Nuc Pol/Sy were present; and on the French side the Ambassador, M. d'Amecourt, Admiral Goupil and M. Scheller.
2. The main topic discussed was future theatre nuclear weapons with particular focus on the ASMP and possible variants of it. Mr Younger floated the idea of trilateral US/French/UK co-operation in a future system. M. Giraud by no means rejected this, and agreed to explore it further, as a first step giving the US the detailed information on the ASMP which has now been made available to the UK.
3. Progress on bilateral nuclear exchanges. Mr Younger said that he was pleased that the initial round of talks had gone well. One cycle was now complete. For the future, we thought that the talks on nuclear weapon concepts and deterrence criteria could be extended to cover the security aspects of arms control and developments, including the requirement for post-INF modernisation, the need to resist any trend towards the denuclearisation of Europe, and the inter-relationship of conventional and nuclear arms control proposals. Exchanges on intelligence and nuclear weapons security and survivability could usefully continue. And the scientific and technical discussions now initiated should be pursued. M. d'Amecourt and Mr Nicholls confirmed that the exchanges so far had gone well. The Secretary of State's proposals, which reflected exchanges between officials, were agreed.
4. Theatre nuclear weapons/ASMP. Mr Younger expressed gratitude for the French presentation to officials in Bourges in October. We were studying options to replace the existing UK TNW and were still some way from making a decision. We would need to make a decision on system choice by about mid-1989 in order to meet an in-service date of the turn of the century. There was little alternative to a collaborative solution, on cost grounds. The ASMP was impressive, but its range of 300 kms at high level fell short of our requirement. We also wished to know more about the penetrativity of the system at high level. Studies were in hand. The ASMP's technology would be 20 years old by the time it came into service with us. But we certainly did not rule out a variant of the ASMP with a longer range. We had been briefed at Bourges on proposals for extending the range. Were there firm plans for an ASMP Mk II, and if



so in what timescale? The US also had plans for a new TASM broadly in line with our own requirements. Trilateral, ie US/French/UK, development could be attractive. How would M. Giraud regard this?

5. M. Giraud said that at present the ASMP had 90 kms range at low level and 350 at high altitude. It had 250 metres accuracy. Tests had shown that 400 kms range at high level could be achieved by modification to the software only. Mr Younger noted that these figures were different from what we had previously heard. Mr Barnes said that the British team had been told at Bourges that the range varied according to the launch conditions. M. Giraud confirmed that the figures had changed as a result of calculations done since the Bourges visit. The range had not been an important part of the weapon specification. It would take four to five years to modify the ASMP to fit the Tornado. A new variant could be produced if the time and money were available. The French had looked at two possibilities in this regard: improved accuracy, which meant modifications to the inertial guidance system; this would take 6 years and a limited amount of investment - say 1 billion francs; or an increase in range to 180 kms at low level and 800-2000 at high level. This would be an entirely new start and would take 10 years plus say 10 billion francs (excluding production; the unit production cost would be twice that of ASMP). The French were not very enthusiastic to embark upon such a development by themselves. He would have no objection to the possibility of trilateral co-operation being explored with the US, although this would be on the basis of a new programme which would be of high risk compared to the tried and tested ASMP. Longer range meant the missile became heated and this would be demanding to overcome. It would however, if we were to go down this road, be silly not to try to co-operate with the US since they were trying to do the same thing. He also took it that a programme would from our point of view need to be seen as co-operative rather than a sale by France. He saw no difficulty in presenting it thus. Perhaps we might purchase the ASMP to meet our short-term needs, and for the longer term co-operate on a new generation of weapon.

6. Mr Younger said that we were not seeking a missile in the short-term partly because our requirement did not arise until the turn of the century and partly because in any case we would not have the capacity to produce a warhead until after the Trident programme was completed in the 1990s. Mr Barnes confirmed that the development and production of a warhead, from start to finish, would take some 10 years. M. Giraud said that he could not see how to help to shorten this timescale unless we were prepared to purchase the warheads from France, which was no problem so far as he was concerned. As for the French timescale, as he had said, it would take some 6 years to produce a variant of the ASMP with improved accuracy.

7. Mr Nicholls said that, as to our requirement, we were looking at the trade-offs between flight profile (high or low), range and accuracy. M. Giraud repeated that it would take 10 years and considerable improvement to redesign the weapon; and the French had



no requirement for their own part to do so. Mr Younger said that our own requirement arose from the need to threaten Soviet territory, at the turn of the century, with an aircraft-launched weapon. It would be useful, as he had suggested, to explore the possibilities for trilateral co-operation with the US with the aim - so far as the British were concerned - of taking a firm decision on system choice by mid-1989. Ought we to proceed by a joint approach to the US? Mr Weinberger, to whom he had spoken, had not ruled out a trilateral approach; nor had Mr Carlucci. M. Giraud suggested a trilateral meeting at Bourges. The French had not yet given the US as complete a briefing as they had given to the British. Mr Carlucci ought to be briefed on the ASMP.

8. M. Giraud asked whether our insistence on developing our own warhead, rather than buying from the French, was immutable. It was a pity that we were set on duplicating the development which the French had already done. The Secretary of State and CDS emphasised the importance of our retaining an independent capability in this field. It would be a very major change of orientation to do otherwise. Mr Younger also repeated that we had no requirement for a weapon until the late 1990s and could not afford on financial grounds to bring forward the programme. A short term project, therefore not a starter; co-operation in the longer term was a distinct possibility.

SSN Visits

9. The Secretary of State said that he understood that the formal exchange of letters setting out undertakings to provide compensation after an accident, on which the UK had passed proposals to French officials, were held up by a drafting difficulty. He hoped that the exchange of letters would soon be agreed. M. Giraud said that resolution of the problem was not far off.

10. The meeting closed with a brief discussion of the line for dealing with the press at the press conference later that morning.

Ministry of Defence

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