

Original with Aus (Staff) 1/6

AUS(NS) 207/82

PS/Secretary of State (Mr. Omand) -

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AUS(D Staff)

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LSDW

1. We had a brief word about a proposal on deploying laser sensor damage weapons (LSDW) to supplement our low level air defence of surface forces in operation CORPORATE which I heard from VCNS this afternoon has been put orally to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State by CDS. Understandably there are few papers available but it had certainly been the original intention to put a written submission to Secretary of State and I do not understand why this was subsequently dropped.

2. It may be helpful for you to have a short background note on the information which I have been able to get hold of this evening. I understand that following work at ASWE and RAE Farnborough we now have available a new quite simple laser device costing £25K per unit which will have the capability to deter pilots of attacking aircraft. The device is a contact continuous wave laser which when trained on/attacking aircraft; pilot will dazzle at ranges of 5 km and, should he attempt to complete his attack blind him at about 1 km. I understand that Argentine pilots depend on visual aids for pressing home all but their Exocet attacks on our forces and the laser weapon would deny them or seriously interfere with this/information.

3. The proposal to use the laser in Operation CORPORATE has been cleared by the Naval Staff with the Chairman of the Military Laser Safety Committee and his advice has been sought on the guidance to be given to the Task Force Commander for its safe operation and control. I understand that the danger to our forces is minimal though, as with all weapons, an accident can never wholly be discounted.

4. The view of the Naval Staff is that so long as we are opposed by a single seat attack aircraft pilots would either be severely dazzled or ultimately blinded by the device and would be forced to abort their mission. Should aircraft with more than a single crew member be involved, there is a remote chance that only some aircrew would be so affected and the aircraft might return to base. It is, however, hard to conceive of circumstances where multi crewed aircraft could approach within 1 km of our defended ships.

5. You indicated to me that the Prime Minister and Secretary of State agreed CDS's proposal. As the weapon will be visible and recognisable as a laser weapon once it is deployed, I believe that we must prepare ourselves for Press questions because of the deployment of correspondents with the Task Force. Defensive material has been prepared and I attach a copy of this for AUS(D Staff) so that this can be available when required. Because of the sensitive character of this matter I have not circulated this Press material on a wider basis.

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