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PRIME MINISTER

LONG RANGE THEATRE NUCLEAR FORCE MODERNISATION

The purpose of this minute is to report, for the meeting of MISC 7 on 5th December, the current position on the modernisation of NATO long range theatre nuclear forces (LRTNF); and to make proposals on public presentation.

The Position in the Alliance

2. Attitudes in the Alliance, apart from those in the Netherlands and Denmark, are encouragingly robust. President Brezhnev's 6th October initiative has been if anything counterproductive. The Americans have put their full weight behind the proposed programme, and made it clear they attach great importance to it. Of the five European countries asked to accept basing, the FRG, Belgium and Italy all share our positive attitude. Provided a broad consensus is maintained most of the "non-basing" countries seem likely to give the political support and modest financial contributions asked of them.

3. The Dutch position remains difficult. Popular anti-nuclear sentiment and opposition within the main coalition party have put the Government in an awkward situation. The key Ministers support the programme, but are aware that if they cannot command a Parliamentary majority to endorse their final decision the Government may fall.

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It was probably helpful that the Dutch were virtually isolated at the recent meeting of the Nuclear Planning Group in The Hague and we need not despair of their eventually joining an Alliance consensus, although their position in December will probably not be known until the last minute, and their decision could be conditional on the ratification of SALT II.

4. I am sure that we must be willing to go ahead even if the Dutch cannot go along with a collective decision in December, leaving it open for them to join later. I believe that our main partners take a similar view. I suggest, therefore, that we should continue to give the Americans robust support in maintaining the concept and substance of the proposals. The new Danish Government have also unexpectedly expressed last minute reservations and proposed that the Alliance decision should be postponed by six months. We, the Americans and Germans have all made it clear in very strong terms that this would be unacceptable, and surprisingly both the Dutch and Norwegians have also said that they do not support the idea. Although the Dutch and Danish positions make the situation more uncertain, I am still reasonably optimistic that -albeit with some difficulty - the programme will be agreed on 12th December, provided that no further unexpected obstacles arise.

Basing in the UK

5. There has been some public concern, especially in East Anglia (which is a possible but by no means certain choice for basing) about GLCM basing in the UK, but I regard this as manageable. We are continuing to pay particular attention to public presentation, and the media coverage has so far been generally favourable.

The Possibility of UK Owned Missiles

6. At our last meeting I undertook to put forward recommendations about the possibility of acquiring UK owned GLCMs with UK warheads to replace the sub-strategic long range capability we shall lose when the Vulcan gives way to the shorter range Tornado in 1982/3. Although there are attractions in such a course, it would not presently be

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SECRET



practicable. Because of the manpower shortages in our nuclear warhead programme explained in my minute to you of 1st November and assuming that we are to have a Polaris successor (and to give the necessary priority to a new warhead for it), on current indications we could not, so far as can be estimated at present, procure a warhead for any other new UK system before about 1990. There is the additional consideration that it would be difficult for us to resist the inclusion of any UK owned GLCM force in SALT II negotiations involving TNF.

7. This does not mean we have to rule out at this stage the possibility of acquiring our own GLCMs from the US and fitting UK warheads. To do so would not presently be politic given our discussions with the US on the Polaris successor. I therefore suggest that we should decide, and inform the US, to defer action on this for the present but to keep the possibility under review in the light of political, military and resource developments, including the situation at Aldermaston.

8. There is some indication that the US may suggest to us that we should buy GLCMs for use with US warheads on the standard "dual-key" basis. I see little attraction in such an idea; they would involve us in large costs without the benefits of operational independence. I therefore recommend that if the US put forward proposals on these lines I should not offer them any encouragement.

Public Presentation

9. We have not formally made public our decision to accept basing of US GLCMs, although we have informed our Alliance partners, and there seems to be a pretty general assumption by British public opinion that we shall. We have, however, made clear our strong support for the proposed programme, and although the Germans, Belgians and Italians are likely to announce their formal decision shortly before the 12th December meeting, I see little value in any further UK statement before then. We shall need to inform Parliament of the collective Alliance decision as soon as possible after it has been taken, and I therefore propose that I

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should make a statement in the House on 13th December after my return from Brussels.

10. I am sending copies of this minute to the Home Secretary, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer; and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

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3rd December 1979

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