

Ref.A0831

PRIME MINISTERMISC 7: Long Range Theatre Nuclear Force Modernisation
and Arms Control

BACKGROUND

This subject was last discussed at MISC 7 on 19th September when the Secretary of State for Defence was authorised to agree that this country should accept the basing of 144 American-owned Ground Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCM) with discretion to go up to 160 if necessary. The Defence Secretary subsequently exercised this discretionary power. In his minute to you dated 3rd December, Mr Pym now reports on the present state of play. In parallel, in his minute dated 23rd November, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary has described the proposed approach to arms control as set out in a report by the NATO Special Group. Both matters can be covered in the same discussion.

HANDLING

2. You could start by inviting the Secretary of State for Defence to introduce his minute on the modernisation proposals. The points to be covered in subsequent discussion can be divided into the three categories of

- a. immediate specific issues
- b. presentational points
- c. longer term policy issues.

- a. Immediate specific issues

- (i) If the Dutch decide not to participate in the GLCM programme, what should the United Kingdom do? Although there is likely to be no argument about going ahead with our part of the programme in these circumstances, if the question of the possible redistribution of the Dutch share arises (as it might), this is more difficult. There is no particular military significance about the 572 figure and the United Kingdom is already prepared to take more than its original share at some additional cost. But the United States may well be keen to maintain the overall total of 572 missiles, because



it provides a higher total than a figure diminished by the Dutch share for subsequent arms control negotiations under SALT III. It may also be argued that a reduction on the 572 total will be seen as a weakness on the part of the Alliance as a whole, and that it would be right to put the Dutch under moral pressure by redistributing their share to more robust allies. Finally, there may have been some agreement between the United States and the FRG, when the latter's total was reduced by 16, that if other allies sought to reduce or evade their share, the FRG would reassume a larger figure. With these considerations in mind the Committee may wish to agree to the Defence Secretary's recommendation that we should be willing to take a modest further increase, say 16 (the Dutch were due to take 48 GLCM) and that we should not take a prominent position in the Alliance in arguing against redistribution.

(ii) Are the last minute reservations expressed by the new Danish Government likely to affect the position seriously either in terms of general agreement to the proposals, or the specific numbers of new weapons to be deployed?

b. Presentational points The Defence Secretary mentions some public concern in East Anglia which he regards as manageable (paragraph 6 of his minute). What does this amount to? Has there been any significant general reaction to the unattributable briefing of Defence correspondents which took place in the Ministry of Defence on 30th October? The Defence Secretary's suggestion of making a statement to the House of 13th December following the NATO Ministerial meeting on 12th December seems sensible. Should he inform the Cabinet on 6th December of his intentions? One particular presentational problem which may arise concerns the so-called 'specific understanding' between your predecessors and the American President, which you renewed last June, that the use of nuclear weapons by United States forces stationed in this country would be a matter for joint decision by the two Governments. This understanding dates back to October 1951 and was last publicly reaffirmed in 1962 (Hansard col.797 6th November 1962).

This recommendation
is not made in the
Defence Secretary's minute.
Presumably he is going
to make it orally.

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United States officials have confirmed in private that these assurances still hold good in relation to their GLCM proposals, but they have asked us not to refer to them in public, if possible, presumably because they have not offered safeguards to the same extent to all other allies. Nevertheless under pressure it may be necessary to refer to the continuance of these assurances, and the Americans accept this.

c. Longer term policy issues The Defence Secretary suggests that we should shelve the issue of acquiring any GLCMs of our own because we could not produce warheads for any new United Kingdom system before 1990. But this means that when the Vulcans give place to the shorter range Tornados in 1982/83, this country will have no national long range theatre nuclear forces. It can be argued, for reasons which you saw demonstrated at the exercise on 22nd October, that one Polaris submarine on patrol may lack credibility as a national nuclear deterrent if there is no intermediate nuclear stage whereby this country can indicate to a potential aggressor that it has the will to resist. Should the Ministry of Defence be invited to give further thought to the relative importance of "sub-strategic nuclear options" in our national nuclear armoury, and report back to MISC 7 on the point?

3. Turning to arms control you will wish to ask the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary if there is anything he wishes to add to his minute to you of 23rd November. The points to be covered in subsequent discussion are

a. Does principle 2, stipulating that arms control negotiations involving TNF should be conducted within the SALT III framework, create a risk that it will override principle 6 which seeks to exclude non-United States allied systems from such negotiations? Are we likely to increase such a risk if we acquire our own GLCMs in due course?

b. Have we any idea how far the United States might be prepared to cut back the 572 launchers in their TNF modernisation proposal as part of the SALT III negotiations?



- c. Is it realistic to bring in Backfire, as principle 12a seeks to do, without expecting the Russians to insist on United States long range bombers being included?
- d. What are the special consultative arrangements envisaged under principle 3? Are they likely to hold good if and when SALT II gets to the stage of Congressional ratification?
- e. What are the chances of the Continental allies accepting this approach to arms control? Is there still likely to be pressure to make SALT II ratification a prerequisite for a decision on TNF modernisation? If so, what are the implications?

CONCLUSION

4. Subject to the points made in discussion, the Meeting might be guided on TNF modernisation
 - i. To note the position set out in the Defence Secretary's minute;
 - ii. to agree that this country should take a modest further increase in our allocation of United States-owned GLCM if the Dutch share has to be redistributed;
 - iii. to agree that this country should not take the lead in arguing against such a redistribution of the United States wishes it to take place;
 - iv. to agree that the Defence Secretary should inform the Cabinet on 6th December and Parliament on 13th December of the decisions which have been taken;
 - v. to agree that the possibility of acquiring United Kingdom GLCMs with United Kingdom warheads should be kept under review but that no steps should be taken to procure United Kingdom GLCMs with United States warheads held on a 'dual-key' basis;



and on TNF arms control

vi. to agree that the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary should endorse the plan before NATO for a negotiation on Long Range Theatre Nuclear Forces;

vii. to invite the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to inform the Cabinet of this decision on 6th December at the same time as they are informed about the decisions on the modernisation of Theatre Nuclear Forces by the Defence Secretary.

RC

4th December 1979