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SUBJECT

See MODBA
note 1.9.80

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

10 July 1980

PRIME MINISTER'S
PERSONAL MESSAGE
SERIAL No. T140/80

Dear Chancellor Schmidt,

As you know, we have been giving much thought in recent months to the question of a successor to our present Polaris force. I wanted personally to let you know that, after intensive deliberations, the Government has concluded that the best course is to replace Polaris in the early 1990s with the US Trident weapons system. I have therefore formally asked President Carter whether the United States Government would be prepared to supply Trident I missiles and equipment (including the MIRV capability) and supporting services on broadly the same basis as Polaris was supplied.

The size of the new force will be not less than four submarines. The option of a fifth boat will remain open for the time being, since it is not necessary to decide this yet. The submarines themselves, and the nuclear warheads, will be designed and manufactured in the United Kingdom.

Like Polaris, the successor force will be assigned to NATO. It will nevertheless, as now, be wholly owned by us and under our sole operational control.

/I am convinced

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I am convinced that this decision is not only in the best interests of the United Kingdom but in those of the Alliance as a whole, to whose security the United Kingdom's continuing possession of a strategic deterrent capability will remain a major contribution. The Trident force will, I believe, place us in the best possible position to operate effectively well into the 21st century in whatever strategic environment we then face.

I should like to emphasise that we remain committed to the strengthening of our conventional forces, including the 3% real annual increase in our defence spending and support of the force improvements programmes already discussed in the Alliance.

I hope that the Government will be able to announce a favourable response from President Carter to this request in the House of Commons in the afternoon of Thursday, 17 July. I attach particular importance to letting you know of our decision in advance of my announcement, but I would be grateful if, till then, you will regard this information as confidential to yourself.

I enclose a copy of a note which we shall be giving our other Allies just before the announcement.

I am sending a similar message today to President Giscard d'Estaing.

Yours sincerely
Margaret Thatcher

His Excellency Herr Helmut Schmidt

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