



Prime Minister

The Foreign Secretary will be commenting. He apparently thinks that any or all of the proposed changes of policy would have a very upsetting effect on the Alliance unless carefully prepared - and that it would be most unwise even to hint at them with Herr Kohl.

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PRIME MINISTER

NUCLEAR ISSUES

I mentioned to you recently that we need a wide-ranging discussion fairly soon about nuclear matters and I think a date is being pencilled in for the first half of next month. Due to my visit to the Falkland Islands, I shall not be seeing you before the German Summit and I think you should know more about my concerns in case the issues arise in your talks with Herr Kohl. I would intend to follow up this minute with something more considered for our meeting in November.

2. The evidence suggests that there is still majority support amongst the Electorate in favour of our maintaining an independent UK deterrent although there is less support for Trident as a successor to Polaris, primarily perhaps because it is seen as an American weapon and because of doubts over cost. There is, however, an unease about NATO's nuclear strategy generally and a feeling that the Alliance places too much reliance on nuclear weapons, is unwilling to contemplate anything other than a growing nuclear stockpile, and attaches too little importance to disarmament. This is not being helped by the attitude of the present US Administration (although of course, under pressure from the Europeans, President Reagan proposed the "Zero option".) As well as this general unease which I believe goes beyond CND and the Labour Party - there is particular concern over the basing of US weapons - much more Cruise Missiles (GLCMs) than US aircraft - in this country which I am sure will become an issue of much higher political importance over the next year or so as the time for deployment of GLCMs approaches.



3. So far as GLCMs are concerned, our room for manoeuvre is of course fairly limited. The options were gone into very carefully in 1979 when, as you will recall, MISC 7 looked at three basic alternatives - the basing of new US-owned systems in the UK (with the possibility of our manning and operating them for the US); the acquisition of new UK-owned GLCMs with US warheads under dual-key arrangements; and the acquisition of UK-owned GLCMs with UK warheads. The last option was ruled out on cost grounds and because we do not have the capability to produce the warheads; the second option was ruled out essentially because it was felt that it would involve us in large costs without the benefits of operational independence; and this left us the US option. We subsequently agreed to provide some UK support for the US force as part of the two-base deal including the provision of some 220 security personnel.

4. The experience of the last 3 years suggests to me that in our original decisions we under-estimated the problem of possible public opposition to the arrival at Greenham Common of a force very different in purpose, character and presence from the dual capable US aircraft that it was replacing - without the increase in British control that might have compensated for some of the force's less desirable characteristics. I do not believe that we should at present seek to go back on the decisions we took. But I do think we need to leave open the possibility of moving towards a dual key arrangement in the medium term and in the meantime take all steps to minimise public opposition to the presently planned force. Three immediate issues arise on this:

a. The NATO decision is based upon GLCMs entering service in December 1983 but, on present plans equipment will begin to arrive in the UK well before it arrives in Italy and in Germany. Large vehicles are planned to arrive here in June next year and missiles for the first flight from August onwards. I believe that I must leave Mr Weinberger in no doubt as to the risk we run with this timing since the issue could be very visible at an autumn General Election.



This could be very damaging to the Alliance as a whole. I would like personally to be satisfied that deployment as early as is proposed is necessary to meet Alliance objectives.

b. Present planning assumes that protection of the GLCMs against armed attack in war will be provided by a mixed contingent of RAF and USAF personnel. In peacetime the missiles will be deployed in training areas to practise wartime dispersal but they will need to travel on public roads. I do not believe that we can afford to ignore the likely public reaction to the deployment of these huge vehicles known to be for cruise missiles on British roads and in the countryside, and we shall need to ensure that on their training deployments they are accompanied by adequate numbers of RAF and civilian police to protect them from interference and to emphasise British responsibility for their peacetime security. Indeed I think we need to look again at whether the security force should not also be wholly British.

c. As part of our co-operation with the Americans on the deployment of the missiles, we should seek to ensure that our personnel learn how to operate the missiles and their vehicles so that we have the necessary background information should we at a later stage want - or be forced by political pressures - to move towards UK operation under a dual key arrangement.

5. On arms control generally, we need to strike a more positive tone over its value and no longer to look - as the public sees it - to be the creature of the Americans. We do not want gratuitously to upset the Americans, to hinder their own efforts in START and INF, or to do anything which adds to the present



tensions within the Alliance generally. But I believe there is scope for our taking more initiative over reductions in NATO's battlefield nuclear inventory whose huge scale reflects history rather than political or military requirements. Such a British initiative, if handled carefully, would I am sure be welcomed by the Germans (there is some evidence that the Americans have been in touch with them about this problem already over the last year). It would also help politically in this country to reassure the public that the Conservative government genuinely believes in the disarmament process where it can be achieved without endangering our security.

6. These propositions would of course need very careful handling. We need to avoid openly implying that we lack faith in the existing arrangements for consultation over the arms control process or over the use of bases in the UK or to do anything which encourages our Allies to back away from their theatre nuclear force modernisation commitments. I think these problems are manageable and it is worth taking the sort of steps I have outlined, while recognising that they will not in themselves solve what I believe will be a growing problem over GLCM deployment in this country. My final warning is this: it may be difficult to make these fairly modest moves - but if we do not contemplate some changes which recognise growing public awareness of these issues - we may find that public opinion runs away from us. If this happens we will lose our strategic deterrent - and much else besides.

7. I am copying this minute to our colleagues on MISC 7 and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

M.H. Gamm

[Drafted by Mr Mott and signed in his absence]

Ministry of Defence

20th October 1982