



PM/82/94

PRIME MINISTER

Nuclear Issues

1. I welcome the opportunity to discuss at our meeting on 12 November the issues raised by John Nott in his minute to you of 20 October, on which I have already commented briefly in my minute of 25 October.
2. I am sure John Nott is right to emphasise the need for a positive approach by HMG to nuclear arms control if we are to meet effectively the understandable public concern on this subject. This will be particularly important in 1983, both for Alliance and domestic political reasons. There is already a growing belief among our European Allies and in some quarters in Washington that some rationalisation and restructuring of the shorter range nuclear inventory in Europe, involving a net reduction in warheads, is indeed overdue. As John Nott is aware, work on this subject has been under way for some time in the NATO High Level Group. We know from recent contacts with them that both the State Department and the Germans are interested in examining this further, to see whether it can be turned to Alliance advantage in the public debate, for example by new Ministerial communique language over the next few months.
3. I am less sure about the room here for a British initiative as such. The review of essential requirements in NATO's sub-strategic nuclear forces is already part of Alliance agenda. The actual nuclear warheads are of course all American and are sited mostly on German soil. If we take up this issue as a means of striking a distinctive British note on nuclear arms for public consumption, we risk complicating NATO's re-examination of short range systems; we would also need to tread very carefully if we were not to risk creating problems with Bonn and Washington, and we could raise new difficulties for ourselves in relation to UK nuclear systems. This need not, however, by any means prevent us from pushing hard within the Alliance forum to keep the necessary





work on the move; and we should do so.

4. As for John Nott's preoccupations about forthcoming cruise missile deployments in the UK, I am completely at one with him that we should not seek to go back on the decisions we took in 1979. But I would go further than that. If HMG were to give any hint that we were having second thoughts about the timing or the scope of UK responsibilities in the NATO programme decided by Ministers in December 1979, we would seriously prejudice relations with Washington and risk bringing about the total collapse of the NATO deployment programme. It is going to be difficult enough to keep the other basing countries up to the mark, given that the political sensitivity in Germany and the Netherlands is much greater than here. The UK is regarded as the staunchest of the Allies in this regard. The Americans look to us for the lead that will encourage the others to overcome their own political difficulties. Any sign of vacillation over timing of initial GLCM deployments in the UK would be a gift to Moscow. The harder line which the Russians have taken since the beginning of the autumn round of the INF negotiations in Geneva has underlined the fact that they are clearly hoping for a collapse of Western political confidence to frustrate the NATO decision, thus releasing them from the need for any real concessions at the negotiations. Conversely, if by our lead we help the NATO deployments to go ahead on time, and if meanwhile the Alliance manages intelligently the battlefield nuclear weapon problem referred to above, not only shall we stand a far better chance of forcing the Russians to make serious negotiating offers in Geneva but we shall have gone a good way towards allaying the public concern about shorter range systems to which John Nott has rightly drawn attention.

5. On the three immediate issues raised in John Nott's minute I have the following comments:-

- (a) I believe it is absolutely necessary for HMG to stick to the schedule for deployment of cruise missiles in the UK agreed with the Americans. We should minimise the visibility of the systems in question by flying them in direct to the base and by ensuring that there are no

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practice dispersals outside the base this side of a General Election. I understand that these practical details are already under discussion with the Americans at the technical level and are unlikely to cause difficulty.

- (b) I see no particular objection to emphasising British responsibility for the peacetime security of GLCMs based in the UK, particularly when on training deployments. If the security force is to be wholly British, however, I suppose more expense may be involved.
- (c) The issue of dual key control is less straightforward. I fully take the point that the question of control is important in relation to minimising public opposition. It is not widely enough known that the Americans did in fact offer dual key arrangements to all the basing countries at the outset. It might be worth discussing with them whether there is any scope for highlighting, or indeed repeating, this offer. But I suspect that the Germans will in any event not wish to alter their own decision that the missiles should be under single US key control; and that there would be complications in having different arrangements for different basing countries. This question may need looking at further.

6. In summary, I do not under-estimate the tricky period ahead both for the Alliance and for the UK. I remain, however, convinced that staunchness of purpose by HMG will have a crucial effect on the success of the Alliance enterprise as a whole. For this, unswerving determination in deployment and tactical adroitness on the arms control side will both be necessary. If we falter on the one, our influence on the other will be nugatory.





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

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'FP', with a horizontal line underneath.

(FRANCIS PYM)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

3 November, 1982

DEFENCE : The future of the UK deterrent



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