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Ref. A083/0283

PRIME MINISTER

MS

MISC 7: Basing of United States Cruise Missiles

BACKGROUND

At the last meeting of MISC 7 in November 1982 Ministers discussed a number of problems associated with the basing of United States Ground Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCMs) in the United Kingdom later this year. It was agreed to defer until early this year a decision on whether to invite the Americans to delay the timing of the arrival of the GLCM equipment so as to avoid a possible overlap with a General Election. The Secretary of State for Defence has circulated a minute dated 25 January reporting where matters stand on this question. Since then you have had a briefing meeting on the political control of nuclear weapons, and in particular on the various Anglo-United States understandings; and there is to be a meeting at Chequers on Sunday 30 January to discuss arms control issues, with particular reference to the line to be taken with the United States Vice President, Mr Bush, about the handling of the Intermediate Range Nuclear Force (INF) negotiations in Geneva.

2. The purpose of this MISC 7 meeting is to consider the possibilities of seeking "dual key" control of the United States GLCMs to be based in the United Kingdom. The Secretary of State for Defence has circulated a minute dated 25 January and the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary is also intending to minute. Also relevant is my minute to you dated 25 January covering a note by the Cabinet Office on the Murphy-Dean Agreement and one by the Ministry of Defence on United States and United Kingdom nuclear weapons systems.

3. The Secretary of State for Defence's minute sets out four options for improving the United Kingdom's control over the use of United States GLCMs based here:

- (a) to announce that we have updated the United Kingdom-United States understanding on political consultation and to seek United States agreement on a more forthcoming public formula;

- (b) to enlarge the British presence at Greenham Common, for example by expanding the British security force;
- (c) to have a control mechanism in the weapons system itself;
- (d) to own and man the missiles.

Only (c) or (d) would give us "dual key" control: the purpose of (a) and (b) would be presentational.

4. Mr Heseltine says that he believes that there are no defence grounds for seeking new control arrangements. He also believes that we need more evidence on public attitudes before making such a far-reaching policy change, and that we should take no steps to seek a British key or full British manning before the general election in West Germany on 6 March.

5. The account of the existing arrangements for political consultation contained in the note attached to the Secretary of State for Defence's minute is perhaps slightly misleading. It singles out as of crucial importance what it calls the "specific understanding": this is not defined, but appears to refer to the Murphy-Dean Agreement of 1958. In fact, the definitive statement of our understandings with the Americans is in the memorandum attached to your letter to President Reagan of February 1981, which is up to date. The Murphy-Dean Agreement specifies the procedures to be followed in carrying out the understandings; and it is these which have not been regularly updated. The only understanding which is publicly acknowledged is the Truman-Churchill understanding of 1952, the essence of which is that the two Governments will reach a joint decision "in the light of the circumstances prevailing at the time". But you stated in the House on 18 January and repeated on 25 January "I have satisfied myself that they (the arrangements for joint decision) are effective".

6. Paragraph 6 of the note attached to the Secretary of State for Defence's minute mentions the nuclear weapon systems in service which require the co-operation of British and United States personnel before the weapon is released. The examples given, Lance, nuclear artillery and nuclear depth bombs, are in fact the only systems in this category.

7. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's minute will set out the international complications involved in seeking from the Americans a degree of control over GLCMs based here which they would be unable to concede to the Germans and the other Allies on whose territory GLCMs would be based.

HANDLING

8. You should invite the Secretary of State for Defence to speak first. The points to cover in the subsequent discussion are:

- (a) Advocates of a "dual key" arrangement base their case on the lack of a physical key in British hands, since agreements to consult, however watertight on paper, could be broken under the stress of events. How will this criticism be met by negotiating a more forthcoming public position on political consultation with the Americans, since it will not tackle the fundamental area of concern?
- (b) Could strengthening the British security presence at Greenham Common help, to the extent that it would then be open to the Government - at least in principle - to order RAF security personnel at the site not to allow the cruise missiles to leave the base (although the Americans could still launch the missiles from within the base)?
- (c) The Government turned down in 1979 an American offer of "dual key" control because it would have involved the United Kingdom buying and manning the missiles (option (d) in Mr Heseltine's minute). Even assuming that what was on offer then could be obtained now, if we were prepared to meet the money and manpower costs, would a change of mind look like a wavering in the staunch support which the United Kingdom has given to the NATO double decision of December 1979? What would be its impact on the United Kingdom's other European allies (notably the FRG)? Might the consequences for our ability to meet the NATO-agreed operational date of December 1983 be more severe than stated in paragraph 8 of the MOD note?

- (d) How would the Americans regard any request from us for a form of "dual key" control, bearing in mind that a primary purpose of the deployment of INF in Europe is to strengthen the "coupling" of the United States strategic nuclear deterrent in the face of European fears that the Americans would not be willing to use nuclear weapons to protect Europe?
- (e) Is providing a "dual key" without having to buy and man the whole system (option (c)) in any circumstances negotiable with the Americans?
- (f) The meeting seems likely to endorse Mr Heseltine's view that we should analyse more fully the nature of public opposition to cruise missile deployment and the extent to which changes in the control arrangements would affect it. But is it wise for the MOD to commission polls itself? The MORI poll published in the Sunday Times on 23 January showed that 54 per cent of the population were against the basing of cruise missiles in the United Kingdom and 93 per cent were in favour of "dual key" (compared with 2 per cent who were willing to let the Americans have sole control).

CONCLUSION

9. The Committee might be guided to the conclusion that it is still too early to take a final decision on this question. Ministers will in any case wish to discuss again, when the Secretary of State for Defence is ready, whether to ask the Americans to postpone the date of arrival of the cruise missile equipment. A great deal will depend on the outcome of the German election in early March and on progress in the INF negotiations in Geneva, on which you are being briefed at Chequers on Sunday 30 January in preparation for the visit of Vice President Bush.

10. Since, however, the Americans have already agreed that GLCMs should be brought within the scope of the Anglo-United States understandings, there is probably advantage in a discreet approach to them fairly soon with a view to revising the procedures in the

Murphy-Dean Agreement so as to bring them up to date and to provide for specific procedures governing the GLCMs. This would be done on the basis that the revised procedures would remain secret; we would not, at this stage at any rate, raise with the Americans the question whether any changes should be made in the public formula.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'R' and 'A' in a stylized, cursive font.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

26 January 1983