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MISC 7(83) 3rd Meeting

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CABINET

NUCLEAR DEFENCE POLICY

MINUTES of a Meeting held at
10 Downing Street on
MONDAY 28 MARCH 1983 at 4.00 pm

PRESENT

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon William Whitelaw MP
Secretary of State for the
Home Department

The Rt Hon Francis Pym MP
Secretary of State for Foreign
and Commonwealth Affairs

The Rt Hon Michael Heseltine MP
Secretary of State for Defence

THE FOLLOWING WERE ALSO PRESENT

Field Marshal Sir Edwin Bramall
Chief of the Defence Staff

Mr R T Jackling
Prime Minister's Office

SECRETARIAT

Sir Robert Armstrong
Mr A D S Goodall
Mr D Brennan

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1. BASING OF UNITED STATES CRUISE MISSILES

(Previous Reference: MISC 7(83) 2nd Meeting)

Ministers resumed their consideration of control arrangements for United States Ground Launched Cruise Missiles to be based in the United Kingdom, and the terms in which the control arrangements might be presented in public. They had before them two minutes (References B 06742 and B06745) dated 17 March from Mr Goodall, Cabinet Office, to Mr Coles, Prime Minister's Office. The first of these covered and commented on an American proposal for the text of a revised Murphy-Dean Agreement on procedures for joint decision concerning United States nuclear weapons based in the United Kingdom. It also recommended a form of words for inclusion in the Agreement, subject to American concurrence, on the question of joint decision on the off-base deployment of cruise missiles. The second minute proposed a line to be taken with Mr Eagleburger of the State Department on the question of public presentation of the arrangements for control of United States nuclear weapons based in the United Kingdom.

MR GOODALL said that the American proposal for a draft text of a revised Murphy-Dean Agreement was satisfactory subject to two small drafting changes, save that, as expected, the Americans had felt unable to suggest a form of words to cover the exercise of joint decision on the off-base dispersal of cruise missiles; they continued to hold to the view that, in the interests of ensuring the survivability of the cruise missile force in a crisis, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) should have the authority to disperse the missiles off-base without specific political approval should circumstances demand. It was proposed that the United Kingdom should suggest that a revised Murphy-Dean Agreement might incorporate language that made clear that, while off-base dispersal of the cruise missiles would in normal circumstances require the British Government's prior approval, SACEUR had standing authority to deploy the missiles away from their bases if that were necessary in order to ensure their survival.

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THE DEFENCE SECRETARY said that under the proposed NATO alert procedures the Government's prior consent to the off-base deployment of cruise missiles would be required except where SACEUR judged it essential to order deployment of the missiles in order to ensure their survival. He suggested that the Royal Air Force officer in charge of the personnel who would accompany the missiles when they dispersed off-base should be under instructions to inform his Commanding Officer immediately dispersal was ordered at any time; the Ministry of Defence police at the cruise missile bases should have similar orders to report dispersal to the Ministry of Defence. If this were done, the Government could be confident that it would learn of an order by SACEUR to disperse the missiles in an emergency at a very early stage, and could, if necessary, take steps to have the order changed. These instructions would not be made known to the Americans.

In discussion it was noted that the arrangement whereby SACEUR could order dispersal of the missiles off-base in an emergency was analogous to those rules of deployment under which nuclear capable aircraft could be ordered into the air under positive control if this was thought necessary to ensure their survival. The assured survivability of the cruise missile force was important for deterrence, and it would therefore be appropriate to agree that SACEUR should have authority to deploy the missiles off-base in an emergency. The revised Murphy-Dean Agreement should make it clear that the Prime Minister had exercised her right of decision to give this authority, but should also provide for a joint decision to be required before the missiles were dispersed in other circumstances.

In further discussion, it was noted that public debate continued to focus on the question of the control of the United States cruise missiles to be based in the United Kingdom. The opposition parties were united in arguing against the existing arrangements for control, and several of the Government's supporters were also expressing concern on the subject. It was unlikely that these concerns could be allayed fully without the United Kingdom adopting a dual-key system control over the missiles. The dual-key control over the Thor missiles previously stationed in the United Kingdom provided an unhelpful

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precedent which was seized upon by those who argued in favour of a dual key. There was likely to be a debate in the House of Commons shortly after the Easter Recess on nuclear defence matters; this would provide an opportunity to test the underlying strength of feeling on the issue. It would not be appropriate, prior to the debate, to explain in confidence to the Government's supporters the exact terms of the understandings between the President and the Prime Minister. Though there was a domestic political case for seeking a dual-key arrangement for the cruise missiles, there were ~~urgent~~ ^{cogent} arguments against doing so at this stage; and in any case it would not now be possible to negotiate such an arrangement with the Americans before the debate in the House of Commons. The Government would have to meet its opponents in the debate with the arguments already available, and might with advantage stress the trust the Americans have placed in the United Kingdom by agreeing to provide the Polaris and Trident weapons systems; this trust should be reciprocated. As to the more general public presentation of the control of United States nuclear weapons in the United Kingdom, it was agreed that the United Kingdom's eventual aim should be as set out in paragraph 3 of Mr Goodall's minute B06745. It would be particularly important to try to secure President Reagan's agreement to state in public that no President would authorise the use of nuclear weapons based in the United Kingdom without the Prime Minister's consent.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that the meeting were generally content with the draft text of an up-dated Murphy-Dean Agreement including the proposed provision on off-base deployment of cruise missiles. They were also generally content with the suggested exploratory line to be taken with the Americans on public presentation of the arrangements for control of United States ^{nuclear} ~~under~~ weapons in the United Kingdom, subject to the draft form of words which the American President might use in public being amended to read that no President of the United States would authorise the use of United States nuclear weapons based on United Kingdom territory without the Prime Minister's consent. In their discussions with the Americans the United Kingdom negotiators should not exclude the possibility that Ministers might be obliged by domestic political pressures to seek dual-key control of the cruise missiles to be based here. The extent to which the public debate could be contained would be of critical importance in coming to any decisions, and the degree to which the United States authorities were able to assist in managing the public debate was therefore highly relevant.

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The Meeting -

1. Approved the draft text of an updated Murphy-Dean Agreement, circulated under, and as amended by, Mr Goodall's minute B 06742, including the proposed provision on off-base deployment of cruise missiles.
2. Approved the exploratory line to be taken with the Americans on public presentation of the arrangements for the control of United States nuclear weapons in the United Kingdom proposed in Mr Goodall's minute B 06745, as amended in the terms indicated by the Prime Minister in her summing up.
3. Instructed the Secretary of the Cabinet, in consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Ministry of Defence -
 - i. to continue negotiations with the United States Administration on the revision of the Murphy-Dean Agreement, on the basis of the amended text approved at 1 above, and to submit the final draft text for approval;
 - ii. in the light of discussions with the United States Administration, to submit recommendations on the content and timing of an approach by the Prime Minister to the President of the United States on a possible new public line on the control of United States nuclear weapons in the United Kingdom.

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2. POLICING OF DEMONSTRATIONS AT MILITARY BASES

Ministers considered the problems likely to be encountered in policing the demonstrations which were expected to be held at military bases over the Easter weekend. They had before them a minute from the Home Secretary to the Prime Minister dated 9 March, and a minute from the Secretary of State for Defence to the Prime Minister dated 18 March covering a Note by Officials of the Home Office and Ministry of Defence describing the expected scale of the demonstrations and reviewing the arrangements which had been made to enhance security at the bases and to police the demonstrations.

THE HOME SECRETARY said that the Thames Valley Police were well organised to cope with the expected demonstrations. There could be a problem for the prison service if the police were obliged to arrest a large number of women, since there was a shortage of women prison officers; it might prove impossible to find accommodation for new prisoners. The possibility of calling on Servicewomen to assist had been considered, but there were insufficient available, and it would in any case be inappropriate to use them in a custodial role.

In discussion, it was noted that Ministers were taking steps to counter the publicity which would accrue to the "peace" movements as a result of the demonstrations. The coincidence of the first anniversary of the invasion of the Falkland Islands with Easter would remind the public in a sobering way of the need to maintain adequate defences.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that the meeting noted the arrangements that had been made to deal with the demonstrations expected at military bases over the Easter period, and the steps being taken to present the Government's policies in public.

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The Meeting -

1. Endorsed the measures which had already been put in hand to police the expected demonstrations at military bases over Easter.
2. Noted the plans which had been made to counter the publicity accruing to the "peace" movements as a result of the Easter demonstrations.

Cabinet Office

29 March 1983

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