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Prime Minister

Mr Gillmore (Defence Dept)

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Call on the Secretary of State by Mr David Aaron

Mr David Aaron, President Carter's emissary on Theatre Nuclear Force issues, called on the Secretary of State this morning, accompanied by the American Ambassador and a member of the NSC staff. Lord Strathcona, Mr Wade-Gery and Mr Moberly were present.

Mr Aaron explained that the object of his current visits in Europe was to try to establish an agreed programme for Theatre Nuclear Forces modernisation on which decisions could be taken by the end of the year. His discussions with the Germans had been moderately encouraging. Chancellor Schmidt clearly wanted to take a decision within this time-scale but was pessimistic about the chances of agreeing on a fully-fledged arms control position by then and seemed to regard this as a pre-condition for modernisation. The Secretary of State said that his impression had been that the Germans wanted to take a decision in principle in favour of Theatre Nuclear Force modernisation, to start arms control discussions in parallel and then to decide on the final numbers of new systems in the light of those discussions. Mr Aaron said that the trouble was that the Germans wanted the decision on force modernisation to be accompanied by a specific arms control proposal, not just a commitment to enter discussions, and their ideas on the arms control side were complex, not well thought out, and would take some time to be refined. The Secretary of State asked whether the German attitude reflected their own domestic concerns or a desire to reassure smaller countries in the Alliance. Mr Aaron thought that it was a mixture of both.

Mr Aaron added that a further problem was that Chancellor Schmidt seemed still to be interested in sea-launched cruise missiles. Mr Aaron's own brief was not to close the door on this option but the Americans had little enthusiasm for it. Such systems would be expensive, would not be militarily effective and would have less deterrent value. The specific force proposals which the Americans themselves favoured were for a mixture of Pershing IIs and ground-launched cruise missiles. The 108 Pershing I missiles now in Germany would be replaced by the mark II version on a one for one basis; and ground-launched cruise missiles would be deployed elsewhere within the Alliance, perhaps by installing 36 launchers (each with 4 missiles) within the UK, 12 launchers in the Netherlands, 12 in Belgium, 24 in the FRG, and 24 in Italy. The Secretary of State asked whether the deployment in the UK was envisaged as a replacement for the British Vulcan bomber force or in addition to it. Mr Aaron replied that the thinking of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on this was not clear. His impression was that they thought that an overall deployment of this size, including 36 launchers in the UK, was what NATO as a whole needed. But that this was without prejudice to the UK's own requirements.

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