

PRIME MINISTER

Agree 1980 test
Programme and
suggested 'in principle' basis
 British Nuclear Test Programme
for 1981 programme. Personally I would be
prepared to go further on the 1981
 The attached papers deal with proposals by the Defence
 Secretary for British nuclear tests in 1980 and 1981. *programme.*

No 10 A.R. 30

The present position as regards tests is that President Carter has agreed that we should have three tests in the course of 1980. All the necessary approvals have been given for the first two of these tests and the practical preparations are in hand. Ministers earlier reserved their position, however, on the third test until we had the results of the test carried out last August. Mr. Pym is now proposing in his minute of 17 December (Flag A) that we should go ahead with the third test in 1980 in order to evaluate a possible warhead for the system to replace Polaris. He also recommends two tests in 1981, one to develop an alternative warhead for the Polaris successor and the other to test a theatre nuclear warhead. His proposals for all three tests for 1980 and for the two in 1981 are summarised in paragraph 7 of his minute.

There is advice from the Cabinet Office at Flag B recommending that you agree to the Defence Secretary's proposals; and at Flag C there is a letter from the Treasury saying that the Chancellor has no objection to the proposed programme.

The Foreign Secretary has minuted you, however, saying that while he is content to go along with the Defence Secretary's proposals for the 1980 tests, he believes that we should be less firm about the tests proposed for 1981 and only proceed with the Americans on these on the basis that we are not committed to them until the need for them is clearer (Flag D). Lord Carrington's reservations turn partly on possible progress in the comprehensive test ban negotiations and partly on his doubts ^{about} whether we need to pursue two alternative warheads for the Polaris successor system.

The Defence Secretary has now submitted a further minute (Flag E) commenting on Lord Carrington's reservations. Mr. Pym acknowledges, as he did in his earlier minute on 17 December, that the successful conclusion of the CTB negotiations might affect his nuclear test plans, and in paragraph 4 of his minute he

/explains

- 2 -

explains why he thinks it advisable to develop two options for the warhead for Trident. He proposes accordingly that we should go ahead with the 1980 test programme as he has submitted it and that for the 1981 programme we should seek the President's approval in principle for two tests but on the basis that we are not committed to them until it is clearer that they do not conflict either with CTB developments or with American policy. This should take care of the Foreign Secretary's points. Are you content for the Defence Secretary to proceed as he proposes in paragraphs 1 and 2 of his minute (Flag E)?

J.W.

9 January 1980



15
26
Defence

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

11 January 1980

BRITISH NUCLEAR TEST PROGRAMME

The Prime Minister has seen the Defence Secretary's minutes of 17 December 1979 and 8 January 1980 about the British nuclear test programme for 1980 and 1981. She has also seen the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's minute of 3 January and Martin Hall's letter of 2 January to you recording the agreement of the Chancellor of the Exchequer to Mr. Pym's proposals.

The Prime Minister is content for the Defence Secretary to go ahead on the basis of paragraphs 1 and 2 of his minute of 8 January.

I am sending copies of this letter to John Chilcot (Home Office), George Walden (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), John Wiggins (H.M. Treasury) and to Martin Vile (Cabinet Office).

C. A. WHITMORE

B. M. Norbury, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence.

SECRET



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PRIME MINISTERBRITISH NUCLEAR TEST PROGRAMME

I am glad to note from the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's minute to you of 3rd January commenting on mine of 17th December 1979 that there is little difference between us. We are agreed on the scope of the 1980 test programme and I should like to advise the Americans of this immediately.

2. As for the 1981 programme, I should like to ask American officials to seek President Carter's approval, in principle, to providing facilities for the two further UK tests in the summer and autumn of that year, as I described in my earlier minute. But I am content to do so on the basis that we are not committed to them until it is clearer that they do not conflict either with our test ban requirements or, for that matter, with American policy.

3. I should like to take this course for a number of reasons. First, it provides the US with reasonable (but not over-long) notice of our potential requirements so that they may plan to accommodate our needs within their own much larger test programme. Secondly, it will serve as a valuable indicator of our intention to maintain a viable nuclear warhead development programme and hence encourage still further American willingness to cooperate with us. Thirdly, it avoids having to take a premature decision on the warhead we shall eventually need for Trident. It does not preclude any of the options for international agreement on test ban arrangements.

/4. ...



4. I confirm that a successful test programme in 1980 would allow us to develop a warhead for Trident but it might not fully satisfy our strategic requirements. These strategic requirements are not the same as the Americans set for their Trident force not least because they have a much wider range of strategic nuclear capabilities and much larger forces at their disposal; thus we cannot assume that the yield of the US Trident warhead would be adequate for our purposes. Nor, at this stage, would it be safe to concentrate exclusively on the [redacted] type warhead, the successful development of which is less certain than for a [redacted] type. As I indicated in my earlier minute, our eventual choice of warhead will depend on balancing a number of factors, some of which we cannot assess until we are able to hold detailed technical talks with the Americans about the Trident missile and have been able to obtain some components thereof for experimental purposes. Beyond our immediate requirements, it is of great importance that our nuclear weapon laboratory continues to be engaged on advanced warhead developments especially if there is going to be a period during which tests are prohibited. The [redacted] approaches to our strategic needs bring us to the forefront of nuclear weapon technology and will not only cement Anglo/US nuclear relations but also stand us in good stead if we have to survive a test ban period.

5. I should be most grateful, therefore, for agreement that I should proceed as indicated in paragraphs 1 and 2 above. American officials are already enquiring about the availability of funds for the initial work on our third 1980 test, and I should like to be able to tell them very shortly that we have decided to proceed.

6. I am copying this minute to the Home Secretary, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Sir Robert Armstrong.

J.P.

8th January 1980

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OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT



PM/80/2

PRIME MINISTER

No 10. A.R. 29.

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OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT

British Nuclear Test Programme

- A 1. Francis Pym has sent me a copy of his minute of 17 December.
2. I agree that we should plan our nuclear testing programme in good time to tell the Americans of our requirements. But as Francis Pym points out, we cannot assume that a CTB will not come into force during the period in question. Our recent discussions in Washington suggest that the US Administration would still like to push these negotiations forward in the coming months; and the Americans do not want to penalise arms control negotiations in reacting to the Soviet moves in Afghanistan. If either Mr Carter or Senator Kennedy wins the Presidential election, the American objective may well be a treaty to enter into force before the end
- B of 1981. As I pointed out in my minute of 17 July, it is also possible that the Americans will decide to stop testing once a treaty is initialled without waiting for it to be ratified.
3. The last time we considered the future test programme the
- C requirement was for three tests in 1980 (Francis Pym's minute to you of 6 July). This was on the basis that at least two more tests were needed after the one in August 1979, which I am glad to see was highly successful. As I understand it, therefore, there is no question of a CTB preventing us from having our own warhead for a Polaris successor.
4. I find it hard to judge how important it may be for our warheads to have a higher yield than the Americans will have for their own Trident missiles. But I wonder whether we really need to contemplate embarking on modifications to the delivery systems as suggested for the [] warhead which is not earmarked for testing before the summer of 1981? Might it not be preferable to /concentrate on the

*Done in
- minute
for
Inkman*



concentrate on the warhead which should be available after the third 1980 test, thus reducing the risk of any clash with a test ban? Obviously we should do our best to ensure as little conflict as possible between CTB and Polaris successor requirements.

5. In short, I gladly go along with plans for the 1980 tests as Francis Pym has proposed. If it is decided to tell the Americans now of the tests suggested for 1981, I believe this should be on the understanding that we will not be committed to them until it is clearer that they are essential.

6. I am sending copies of this minute to the Home Secretary, the Defence Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Sir Robert Armstrong.

(CARRINGTON)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

3 January 1980

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OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT

TOP SECRET



CH/EX. REF. NO. MAH(80) 1

COPY NO. 2 OF 9 COPIES

Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG
01-233 3000

2nd January 1980

Mr Sir,

BRITISH NUCLEAR TEST PROGRAMME

The Chancellor has seen a copy of the Defence Secretary's minute of 17th December to the Prime Minister, has noted that the costs of the proposed nuclear tests would be met from within the Defence Budget (Treasury approval being sought seriatim for expenditure on each test), and has asked me to say that he has no objection to the proposed programme.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to the Prime Minister, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and to Sir Robert Armstrong. A copy also goes to the Private Secretary to the Home Secretary.

Yours ever,

MHC

(M.A. HALL)

B. Norbury, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence

TOP SECRET



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MR. WHITMOREBritish Nuclear Test Programme

attached — In his minute to the Prime Minister of 17th December the Secretary of State for Defence seeks political clearance to approach the United States with a proposed underground nuclear test programme involving five tests spread over the period April 1980 - autumn 1981. The United States have already approved the first three tests of the series which will all take place in 1980.

2. This proposal follows the one put to the Prime Minister on 6th July to which Mr. Cartledge conveyed the Prime Minister's agreement on 28th July. These tests form an important part of the British warhead development programme, both in relation to the strategic deterrent and any future theatre weapon warhead programme. They will also strengthen our hand in exchanging technical information with the United States and demonstrate the firmness of our intention to remain a nuclear power.

3. The main potential difficulty relates to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty on which there are signs of movement as Washington telegram no. 4255 of 18th December indicates (copy attached). This movement seems unlikely to interfere with any of the tests planned for 1980, but the position in 1981 is more uncertain. This is likely to be the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's main comment on this proposal. The Secretary of State for Defence has already said in his minute of 26th July to the Prime Minister that these nuclear tests are difficult to accelerate. This fact coupled with the attendant circumstances suggest that the latter part of this proposed test programme may be at risk. The Ministry of Defence recognise this. Subject to this qualification, the balance of advantage seems to lie in agreeing that these proposals should be put to the United States as the Secretary of State for Defence recommends.



SECRET

4. The Chancellor of the Exchequer is unlikely to raise any objection to the proposal subject to an assurance that the costs will be met from within whatever level of defence cash provision may be finally agreed. The Secretary of State for Defence's statement in the latter part of paragraph 7 that the "costs will be met from the defence budget subject to Treasury approval in each case" meets this point.

MJV.

(M. J. Vile)

20th December 1979



The National Archives

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