

TOP SECRET



Prime Minister.

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To see.

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CABINET OFFICE

70 Whitehall, London SW1A 2AS Telephone 01-233 8319

From the Secretary of the Cabinet: Sir Robert Armstrong KCB, CVO

Copy No. 1 of 4 Copies

21st January, 1980

Ref. A01181

Dear Aine,

Polaris Successor

I had a brief discussion with Dr. Brzezinski on this subject, in the margins of our meeting in Paris on 15th January.

I recalled that, at the time when the President had asked the Prime Minister to postpone her request until after the Congress had approved - or rejected - the ratification of SALT II, the expectation had been that that process would be completed one way or the other in the first three months of 1980. The decision to defer Congressional consideration of this subject in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had upset his timetable. It might now be a year or more before SALT II could be ratified. We could not possibly wait that long for a decision. To do so would create a delay in the programme which could have unacceptable consequences in the early 1990s, when our present submarines would be at the end of their useful life. There was considerable interest in this matter in Britain: indeed, there was shortly to be a debate in the House of Commons on the nuclear deterrent. The Government could no doubt survive that debate without making an announcement, but extended delay could raise questions both about the British Government's intentions and about the reality of the United States Government's commitment. The climate in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan seemed to us to provide a good opportunity for announcing a decision on this matter.

Dr. Brzezinski said that he had not yet had an opportunity to discuss the matter with the President, since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. He was at pains to repeat and confirm the President's commitment to a positive reply to the request, when it was received. He agreed that it was unthinkable for us to wait for a year. The only question in his mind was the tactical one, of finding the right moment (or "window") for the announcement. He had two considerations particularly in mind:

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C. A. Whitmore, Esq.

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- (1) The decision should be announced at a time when it would be least likely to have adverse effects on the Belgian decision on TNF.
- (2) Though SALT II had not been ratified, the Russians were observing it, and he would be anxious to make the announcement at a time when it would be least likely to change that situation, or to cause the Russians to try to impose new conditions for their own confirmation of SALT II.

I agreed with Dr. Brzezinski that I would let him have our observations on these tactical considerations at an early date; thereafter the matter could be taken further by a visit to Washington either by me to him or by Wade-Gery to Aaron. I made it clear that we should be wanting to pursue this without prolonged delay.

I have asked Robert Wade-Gery, in consultation with his contacts in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence, to prepare a draft message for me to send to Dr. Brzezinski; I will submit that for the Prime Minister's approval. We shall then have to consider how to follow it up. It is arguable that the scope for dilatory manoeuvres might be less if I went to see Dr. Brzezinski; on the other hand discussion with Aaron may prove to be more constructive, and it may therefore be better for Robert Wade-Gery to undertake the mission.

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Cabinet Office
request 22.1.80

~~I am sending copies of this letter to George Walden and Brian Norbury.~~

Yours ever

Robert Armstrong



Defence 17

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

22 January 1980

Polaris Successor

I have shown the Prime Minister your letter of 21 January 1980 to me.

She was grateful to be told of your discussion with Dr. Brzezinski on this subject when you were in Paris last week and she has noted the action you are now taking to follow up the conversation.

I am sending copies of this letter to George Walden and Brian Norbury.

C. A. WHITMORE

letters recalled
as per Cabinet
Office request
22.1.80

Destroyed 24.1.80
Re.
ABO

Sir Robert Armstrong, KCB CVO

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