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MO 18/1/1

PRIME MINISTER

POLARIS SUCCESSOR

1. When, during your talks with President Carter in Washington last December, you broached the subject of UK/US co-operation on a successor to UK Polaris you were met with a favourable general response but a clear reluctance to receive and respond to a specific request in the immediate future. This reluctance related mainly to calculations over SALT II ratification. I gather that the Cabinet Office has been probing White House attitudes on whether, post-Afghanistan, there could be a decision, but I understand that no clear view has yet emerged. I recognise that there are international problems (there always will be!), but we do, I consider, now need to determine a course of action.
2. I regard the present position as increasingly uncomfortable, both politically and practically. Domestically, we have so far managed to fend off pressure to explain the successor system we have in mind but we find this line less easy to sustain as we move into the Defence White Paper/Defence Debate season. There is great interest in this whole subject and an increasing air of bewilderment and mystery about it, Further publications are appearing. The Select Committee on Defence wish to start work on it. The media will be in full cry in April.
3. My more immediate concern, however, is with mounting practical difficulty. I would not claim that there are instant deadlines in a project for the 1990s. But there are areas of work - notably the submarine design, and preparations for the immensely complex works needed at the Coulport depot for the missiles - where we may later much regret delay now, especially if the approach of the US Presidential campaign were to push off decisions into 1981.
4. Moreover, we know that production of the C4 missile for the US is due to cease in 1986, and we shall want to add our own requirement to the end of the US production run. It is in our practical interests to place orders as soon as we can for long lead materials, for which US contracts are placed well in advance of the main production; the longer it is before the way is clear for us to do this, the greater is the risk that we shall face increased costs and technical problems.

/5.



5. We also face a practical problem over the whole impact of a Polaris successor on our defence programme. As I shall shortly be reporting to OD, the reconciliation of our future programme with the resource levels now set by PESC decisions is a formidable and involved task. The Polaris successor will be our biggest single future project, with wide repercussions upon other parts of the programme in terms not only of money but also of many other resources such as shipbuilding capacity, nuclear support, and Service and civilian manpower. The sooner I can give my Department firm and visible planning assumptions and guidance, the better.
6. For all these reasons I believe that further delay will be increasingly harmful to our interests and to the efficient conduct of business. I suggest that we should bring all reasonable pressure to bear upon the US to move forward quickly to a satisfactory decision; and I should be very grateful if you would consider taking the matter up again with President Carter.
7. I am sending copies of this minute to our MISC 7 colleagues and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

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Ministry of Defence

29th February 1980



29 FEB 1980



COMMUNICATIONS

III



Agree that we should proceed
as proposed by Sir Robert Armstrong and
that I should reply to the Queen's
Secretary on the lines of the draft attached?

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Ref. A01581

PRIME MINISTER

Yes no

RAH
3ii

Polaris Successor

The Secretary of State for Defence's minute to you of 29th February (MO 18/1/1) understandably complains about the lack of progress towards an Anglo-American agreement on the provision of the C4 missile as Polaris's successor, and asks you to consider taking the matter up again with the President.

2. Although no papers on the subject have been allowed outside No. 10 and the Cabinet Office, Mr. Pym is aware that the President promised you in writing last October to agree to provide the C4 missile if and when we asked for it; that he reaffirmed this to you in Washington on 17th December; and that we have since been pressing the White House to lift the President's request to you to delay making our application. My letter to Mr. Whitmore of 21st January and my minute to you of 11th February recorded my talk with Dr. Brzezinski and Mr. Wade-Gery's longer talk with Dr. Aaron. We have left them in no doubt that the continued delay is seriously worrying us, for many reasons, including those now cited by Mr. Pym. We sent Dr. Aaron a reminder when we had not heard further from him by 28th February. In reply he has now proposed that Mr. Wade-Gery should visit Washington in mid-March. I think we should agree to this, although it is still a slower timetable than we should wish.

3. In theory, you could send our formal request to the President at any time. He cannot stop you, and he has already promised that the answer will be Yes. But this would clearly be unwise, when he has so clearly asked you not to do so until he is ready.

4. A written message from you to the President may well be necessary if his staff continue to prevaricate. But I am inclined to keep this in reserve while there is still hope that lower-level pressure may do the trick.

5. I therefore suggest a temporising reply to Mr. Pym, on the lines of the attached draft.

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

3rd March, 1980



TOP SECRET

DRAFT LETTER FROM C.A. WHITMORE TO
B.M. NORBURY, ESQ., PS TO SECRETARY OF
STATE FOR DEFENCE

Polaris Successor

The Prime Minister has seen the Secretary of State for Defence's minute of 29th February (MO 18/1/1). *P* She fully shares his regret that this matter is still unsettled, and agrees with the reasons he cites. Pressure is being maintained on the White House, and there is to be a further discussion in a fortnight's time. ^{The (now) Ministry} I hope that this will bring better progress. Meanwhile it remains of the highest importance, in this delicate matter, that no approaches should be made in other channels.

CONQUEROR
LONDON

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2 " " (Tsy)
 3 " " (P20)
 4 " " (Home/ha)
 5 " " (RFA)

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From the Principal Private Secretary

4 March 1980

Dear Brian,

POLARIS SUCCESSOR

The Prime Minister has seen your Secretary of State's minute of 29 February (MO 18/1/1).

She fully shares his regret that this matter is still unsettled and agrees with the reasons he cites. Pressure is being maintained on the White House, and there is to be a further discussion in a fortnight's time. The Prime Minister hopes that this will bring better progress. Meanwhile it remains of the highest importance, in this delicate matter, that no approaches should be made in other channels.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to the other members of MISC 7 and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours ever,

Alvi Whitmore.

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

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

POLARIS SUCCESSOR

The Prime Minister has seen your minute AO1581 of 3 March 1980 and agrees that we should proceed with the Americans as you propose.

I attach a copy of the letter which I have now sent to Mr. Pym's Private Secretary.

fas.

4 March 1980

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET