

Ref: B05951

PRIME MINISTERMISC 7: Future of the United Kingdom  
Strategic Deterrent: The Present Position

## BACKGROUND

1. This meeting was recommended in Sir Robert Armstrong's minute to you of 19th May, which reported on our latest negotiations with the White House; and was authorised in Mr Alexander's reply of 23rd May. The Secretaries' Note (MISC 7(80) 1) outlines developments since MISC 7 last met, on 6th December. That was the last time Mr Whitelaw and Sir Geoffrey Howe were both involved, although the latter also attended your pre-Washington briefing meeting on the subject on 14th December. They have not previously been told of the key fact that President Carter has promised to agree to our request when made, although the Chancellor may have become aware of this during your 14th December meeting. The Note is therefore deliberately ambiguous about when the President's promise was first made. The uninitiated will assume that it was when you were in Washington. Lord Carrington and Mr Pym, on the other hand, are aware that what the President said on that occasion merely confirmed his message to you of 15th October. They have also been kept informed of the course of negotiations. The Defence Secretary, as his minute to you of 29th February made clear, has been worried by American procrastination and is very anxious to see formal and public agreement achieved as rapidly as possible.

2. The Secretaries' Note also seeks, with recommendations, Ministerial decisions on the issues which remain to be finally sewn up in the negotiations: the text of the Exchange of Letters; the timetable for the Exchange, for informing Allies and for publication;  
; and the problem of the R and D levy.

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TOP SECRET

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3. The United States Defense Secretary is calling on you at 4 pm on 2nd June, ie a few hours after MISC 7 meets. The White House have just told us that he will be "prepared to discuss" both Polaris replacement. This probably means that he will raise the latter and will be ready for you to raise the former. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office are sending you a brief [redacted]. On Polaris replacement, and on the link between the two, you will wish to be guided by MISC 7's decisions.
4. In the light of MISC 7's decisions, and of your talk with Dr Brown, officials will be in a position to finalise the negotiations with the Americans, probably by visiting Washington in the week of 9th June.
5. The draft of your letter to the President, at Annex A to MISC 7(80) 1, differs in one minor respect from the last version you saw, attached to Sir Robert Armstrong's minute of 19th May. The opening words "As you are aware" are no longer followed by "from recent exchanges between us". The deleted words originated when we expected to publish the Exchange soon after your Washington visit and are no longer appropriate now. The Americans agree that they should be dropped; and Mr Pym and Lord Carrington (who saw the earlier text) have been informed.

HANDLING

6. You may like to begin by stressing the sensitivity of MISC 7(80) 1. It contains information which, at White House insistence, is known only to a tiny circle of Ministers and officials in London and Washington. This includes neither the American nor the British Chiefs of Staff. The only copies of the paper which have gone outside No. 10 and the Cabinet Office are those which your four colleagues will bring to the meeting. You may wish to ask them to hand these in when the meeting ends. (We have taken steps to ensure that they are not meanwhile shown to anyone not in the secret.)
7. Turning to substance, you may wish to begin by referring to MISC 7's decision on 6th December that the best weapon system with which to replace Polaris was Trident I. (The minutes of that meeting were not circulated outside the Cabinet Office but are summarised in paragraph 1 of MISC 7(80) 1).





② You may wish to emphasise that this is a decision which has already been taken and effectively (though not formally) communicated to the Americans. The Chancellor of the Exchequer may seek to reopen the whole question of whether Polaris should be replaced at all and if so by what, on the grounds that the national economic outlook has deteriorated since last December. If so, you may wish to seek the Foreign and Commonwealth and Defence Secretaries' agreement that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan since the last MISC 7 meeting means that the need for effective deterrence has if anything increased. The studies which preceded the December meeting made clear that Trident I was the only successor system which made military or financial sense for the United Kingdom. There is in any case no question of the Defence Budget being enlarged to accommodate Polaris replacement. The Defence Secretary can confirm that the Budget now contains sufficient financial provision for the estimated cost of Trident I procurement, and that since it is an existing United States programme, the estimates ought to prove reliable (as the estimates for Polaris did).

8. The points to establish in subsequent discussion are -

a. The Proposed Exchange of Letters

i. The size of the British successor force. Paragraph 2 leaves this open. The Defence Secretary would of course prefer 5 boats. For different reasons the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Chancellor would prefer 4. But they are all likely to agree that the question does not have to be settled yet. Nothing is lost by keeping our options open; and it may help to disarm criticism that this major defence decision has been taken without public discussion if one significant aspect of it is left undecided at the stage when a public announcement is made.

ii. Impact on conventional forces. The wording of the last sentence in paragraph 4 is a matter to which the Americans attach great importance. We have fought hard to keep the drafting as





vague as possible. They are unlikely to accept any further watering down. Are the Chancellor and the Defence Secretary content?

iii. Proposed financial and technical negotiations (paragraph 5) The Chancellor may argue that these ought to precede any public announcement, to avoid the appearance of buying a pig in a poke. But on such a politically sensitive issue the Americans would certainly not agree to detailed negotiations unless some general understanding had already been reached and published. Hence the need for the Exchange of Letters. In any case, detailed negotiations will take many months; and we need to conclude the Exchange of Letters now, given the co-operative attitude of President Carter, which will not necessarily survive the United States elections.

b. Special Nuclear Materials. The Ministry of Defence are content with the terms of the proposed confidential side letter from the President. ("The United States is willing in principle to supply special nuclear materials to the United Kingdom deterrent programme which were beyond your own capacity to provide, subject of course to the United States Government's ability to provide such materials in light of its requirements and availability of supply.") But some of your colleagues may have seen a Times article of 20th May suggesting that Aldermaston may not be able to cope with producing the necessary new warhead. If so, the Defence Secretary should be invited to reassure them. The Ministry of Defence and Foreign and Commonwealth Office are also satisfied that there is no prospect of a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in a timescale short enough to affect our ability to test the new warhead adequately when it is ready.

c. The Proposed Timetable Are your colleagues content with this, subject to a right to think again if the timing turns out to be very bad in European Budget terms? Warning Herr Schmidt, President Giscard and Signor Cossiga clearly involves risks of a leak. But the Americans seem certain to insist on at least the two former.



d.

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e. The R and D Levy. The deal suggested in MISC 7(80) 1 is the one which Mr Aaron asked Sir Robert Armstrong and Sir Frank Cooper on 18th Feb whether they could accept; they merely undertook to report it, and Mr Aaron made clear that he had no authority to offer it. Could your colleagues accept this as a reasonable compromise? The Defence Secretary is likely to confirm that he could accommodate within the Defence Budget both a 5 per cent levy and the cost of manning the American Rapiers. The Chancellor may argue that the R and D issue should be left over for the detailed financial negotiations. This may seem logical. But the Americans will plainly not agree to it. Nor would it be in our interests. We cannot avoid playing the Diego Garcia card pretty soon. To get full value for it we need first to reach agreement on the R and D levy.

f. Publicity Material. The Defence Secretary should be invited to circulate to MISC 7 in draft, for information, the detailed paper which he plans to publish explaining our choice of successor system. The Chancellor may suggest that no such document should





be published, for fear of weakning our hand for the detailed technical and financial negotiations. If so, the Defence Secretary will argue that publication will be essential in domestic political terms (and that he is in any case publicly committed to it). Your other colleagues seem likely to support him.

## CONCLUSION

9. In the light of discussion on these points, you may wish to guide the Meeting to endorse the recommendations in the final paragraph of MISC 7(80) 1.
10. You may also wish to indicate that you will tell the Cabinet shortly before the Exchange is published, ie presumably on 26th June.

R L WADE-GERY

30th May 1980



## Whitehall brief: Aldermaston snag on staff and safety

# Trident deterrent may be toothless

By Peter Hennessy

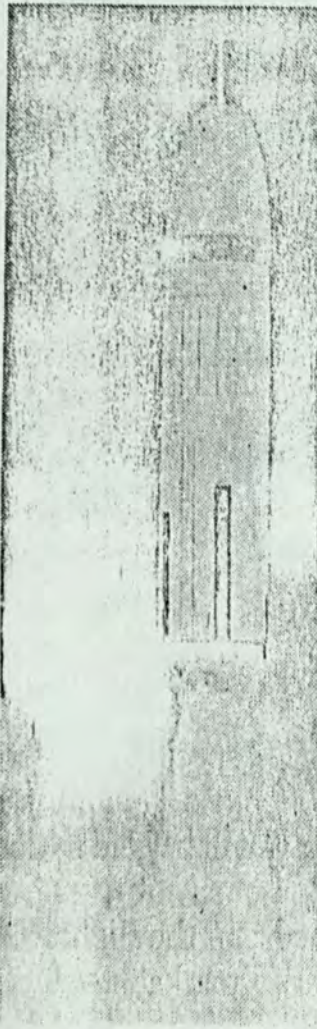
Only the timing needs of President Carter's reelection campaign are delaying the Prime Minister's announcement of a £4,000m-£5,000m spending programme over the next 12 years to replace the Royal Navy's Polaris Submarine Squadron with a fleet of boats fitted with Trident missiles purchased from the United States.

Mrs Margaret Thatcher's top secret nuclear deterrent Cabinet committee, Misc 7, as it is known from its Cabinet Office classification, has finished its work. Technical talks between the Ministry of Defence and the Pentagon are complete.

The Commons Select Committee on Defence will start its investigation into the Polaris replacement in the next few weeks. All that is needed for work to begin is a Commons statement from the Prime Minister and the inevitable eruption from Labour's backbenches; or is it?

The Royal Navy's Trident missiles will carry British warheads which are to be manufactured at the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at Aldermaston, Berkshire. Mrs Thatcher may have President Carter's promise that the missiles will be forthcoming, and she also seems confident of finding the money, but will Aldermaston be able to play its part in providing the "front end", as the men on Whitehall's "holocaust desk" call it?

A confidential report prepared by a Ministry of Defence working party chaired by Mr Charles Henn, under-secretary responsible for civilian specialists, discloses that Aldermaston is 59 per cent short of the health physicists required to ensure the safety of its processes and plant. The establishment needs 44 health physicists and only 18 are in post. The report reflects gloomily on the failure of a special Civil Service Commission competition to find more than a handful of



The Trident missile: Warhead production is in jeopardy.

suitable scientists to fill the gap.

The report also admits that the prospects of finding health physicists in the near future are dismal and states baldly that, unless they are forthcoming, existing projects, and, most

significant of all for Trident, future programmes will be jeopardized.

The shortage, it seems, is common to all defence installations needing health physicists—at the end of last year, the ministry was 55 short of the 110 civilians it needs and six short of the 27 servicemen—but the difficulty is most acute at Aldermaston.

Pay is the general cause of the health physicists gap. Whitehall offers salaries £3,000 to £4,000 less than qualified staff can earn in the private sector or on the nuclear side of the electricity generating industry. But a special Aldermaston factor makes staff in general, and not just health physicists, unwilling to work there.

In 1978 Sir Edward Pochin, a leading radiologist, disclosed in a report prepared for the ministry that some buildings at Aldermaston contained concentrations of plutonium higher than prescribed safety levels. The ministry undertook immediately to put right the deficiency and the recruitment of more health and safety staff was critical to the solution.

Mr Henn's working party suggests, without much hope, a few remedies to make good the continuing shortage. Mr Kenneth Jones, a deputy chief scientific officer, has been appointed to lead a committee to recruit graduates direct from university for a two year health physics training course. The revival of a scheme for cadet health physicists is being discussed, as is the provision of a special course at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich.

One of the first tasks of Mr Douglas Miller, clerk to the Select Committee on Defence, and Dr Lawrence Freedman, its special adviser on the Polaris replacement, should be to secure a copy of the Henn report from the Ministry of Defence for their MPs. Trident missiles without Aldermaston warheads will deter no one.

Tues  
20/5/80