



PRIME MINISTER

SDI RESEARCH: UK PARTICIPATION

Your Private Secretary's letter of 1 November seeks comments from OD members on the arrangements for British participation in SDI research drawn up in negotiations between the Defence Secretary and his United States' counterpart.

2. Before we commit ourselves to the arrangements negotiated by the Defence Secretary, I think it is important from the point of view of MISC 119, which you asked me to chair, that the other interested departments should have the opportunity to examine the revised draft Memorandum of Understanding, to ensure it meets our requirements in terms of unrestricted use by the UK of technology generated through British participation in SDI research. That apart, I remain concerned that this major new programme of defence R & D will add to the problem of the imbalance between civil and defence R & D on which MISC 119 is now working in the light of the MISC 110 Report. You emphasised, in your summing up of our recent OD discussion, that UK participation in SDI should not cut across the aim of reducing the proportion of the UK's total research effort devoted to military purposes.

3. The degree to which scarce research resources in the UK may be diverted from the civil field by work in support of SDI will depend on two main considerations. The first is how research work planned by the Ministry of Defence is to be cut back to make room for SDI research. The second is the distribution of the UK's contribution to SDI research among the eighteen proposed areas of technology. I suggest that our next step should be to ask officials to consider in MISC 117 these two important issues, so that we can satisfy ourselves that the national interest, including the interest in the growth

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of civil R & D, will be furthered as much as possible through our participation in SDI research before committing ourselves to the arrangements proposed with the Americans. In reporting to Ministers, MISC 117 would need to form a view about how the UK SDI Office will work in practice to co-ordinate UK participation in the US initiative, and how far it could protect scarce UK scientific resources from pre-emption by the US outside the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding.

4. I am sending copies of this minute to the members of OD, to the Secretary of State for Education and Science, Sir Robin Nicholson in the Cabinet Office, and Sir Robert Armstrong.

*Yours Sincerely  
R Lawrence.*

(Approved by the Lord President  
and signed in his absence.)

Privy Council Office  
6 November 1985

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