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POLARIS REPLACEMENT

1. I attach the draft of a memorandum which the Government might publish in discharge of the Secretary of State's undertaking to the House of Commons on 29 April, to accompany an announcement of a decision on Polaris replacement. It is based on the hypothesis of a Trident I purchase. I have sought to take account of comments by some addressees on a preliminary version.
2. Copies are going also to the Cabinet Office, PCO and Treasury. It will be necessary at some stage to consult the US.
3. I should be grateful for any comments not later than Monday 19 May.
4. The matter remains of great sensitivity.

9 May 1980

M. B. Quinn
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BRITAIN'S STRATEGIC NUCLEAR FORCE:
THE CHOICE OF A SYSTEM TO SUCCEED POLARIS

I - INTRODUCTION

1. On 1980 the Government published the texts of letters exchanged between the Prime Minister and President Carter providing for the United Kingdom to buy from the United States [Trident] ballistic missiles and supporting components for a force of British missile-launching submarines to replace the present Polaris-equipped force.
2. The new agreement is broadly similar to the 1962 Nassau Agreement (Cmd 4000). Following that Agreement and the 1963 Polaris Sales Agreement based upon it the US sold the UK Polaris A.3 missiles and related equipment, together with continuing spares supply and maintenance support. The four nuclear-propelled submarines and the nuclear warheads for the missiles were designed and built in Britain. The force as a whole is entirely owned by the UK, and final decisions on its operational use rest with Her Majesty's Government alone. It is however committed to NATO and targetted in accordance with Alliance policy and concepts under plans made by the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), save where Britain's supreme national interests otherwise require.
3. The Government has already shown that it attaches much importance to helping wider understanding and more informed public discussion of major defence issues. The present issue is certainly a major one, one of the biggest that can face any British Government in

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the defence field. The Secretary of State for Defence undertook to Parliament on 28 April 1980 that when the Government's decision was taken he would publish as full an account as security would allow of the reasons for the choice of system. This memorandum makes good that undertaking. A few of the relevant factors cannot be published, and certain detailed information is not ours to disclose. Most of the factors can however be given, and the Government believes they show clearly that ^{existing} Trident is the right choice for Britain. This memorandum explains why.

No.

Weapon System.

we are purchasing a Weapon System
not a missile

II - THE POLICY BACKGROUND

4. It is not the purpose of this memorandum to debate at length the basic policy case for Britain's continuing to contribute to NATO an independent strategic nuclear force. That case was explained by the Secretary of State for Defence on 24 January 1980 to the House of Commons, which after debate backed the Government's policy by 308 votes to 52; and a further account was given in paragraphs 201-204 of the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1980 (Cmd 7826-1). For convenience, however, the main features are summarized again below.

5. Britain was a wartime partner with the United States in the development of nuclear weapons. We conducted our first independent test in 1952, and have had a full operational capability with our own delivery systems since the first V-bombers entered service in 1955. The policy issue therefore is not whether to acquire a strategic nuclear deterrent capability, but whether to give it up in the 1990s after having possessed it for nearly forty years.

6. Britain commits all its nuclear capability to NATO in conformity with concepts of collective deterrence worked out in the joint forum of the Nuclear Planning Group. The decisive consideration in favour of an independent British capability is the contribution it makes to NATO's strategy of deterrence and thus to our own national security.

7. The United States has massive nuclear power. It has, by its words and deeds, repeatedly made clear its total commitment to help