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THE CREDIBILITY OF BRITISH NUCLEAR INDEPENDENCE

1. I attach an informal note - which in my view need not be regarded as classified - on the deterrent credibility of independent British nuclear action. It seeks to reflect your own comment, for which I am grateful, on an earlier draft.
2. At the York conference on civil defence which I attended on 2 July Lord Chalfont made it plain that he envisaged having a further go on this subject during the House of lords defence debate on 20 July.

15 July 1981

W.E.Q.
M E QUINLAN
DUS(P)

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DRAFT

C.A. Whitmore, Esq.,
No. 10 Downing Street

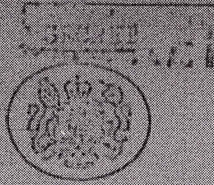
CHEVALINE FLIGHT TRIALS

You will recall that my letter to you of 14 October gave notice of a sequence of three CHEVALINE flight trials from HMS RENOWN in mid-November, following the successful completion earlier in the year of the pad-launched trials.

2. It was decided in the event not to proceed with the third, because the first two went wrong. Briefly, the launches themselves went successfully, but in both cases a failure in the primary ordnance supply circuit, after the separation of the Penetration Aid Carrier (PAC) from the second stage of the missile, meant that the complex sequence of events which should then follow (e.g. the deployment of decoys) was not initiated.

3. This is an unwelcome setback, especially as despite intensive investigation we are not yet sure of the causes. Some areas of potential weakness in the primary ordnance circuit have been identified and remedial action is in hand. We plan to launch three further trial rounds from a submarine in July 1981. There will inevitably be delay to the first operational deployment, previously scheduled for mid-1981 (although initially with only a partial complement of missiles). Public statements on the matter have however been deliberately imprecise, so no new announcement is needed. We are now aiming at first deployment of a full tactical outload in March 1982. Whether we achieve this depends crucially on how the July trials go.

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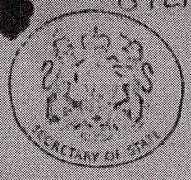
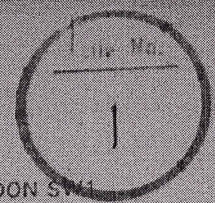


- 2 -

4. None of this has come to public notice. The US Government of course knows of it, but we see no particular reason why it should come up when the Prime Minister visits Washington next month.
5. My Secretary of State will continue to watch the position closely and I will keep you informed.
6. I am sending copies of this letter to George Walden and Donald Wright.

CONFIDENTIAL

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B1217

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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
 MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1
 Telephone 01-8327822 218 2111/3

MO 18/1/1

30th January 1981

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Dear Sir,

CHEVALINE FLIGHT TRIALS

SECRET 3 AT7

My letter to you of 14th October last year gave notice of a sequence of three CHEVALINE flight trials from HMS RENOWN in mid-November, following the successful completion earlier in the year of the pad-launched trials.

My Secretary of State has asked me to write to say that it was decided in the event not to proceed with the third, because the first two went wrong. Briefly, the launches themselves went successfully, but in both cases a failure in the primary ordnance supply circuit, after the separation of the Penetration Aid Carrier (PAC) from the second stage of the missile, meant that the complex sequence of events which should then follow (eg the deployment of decoys) was not initiated.

This is an unwelcome setback, especially as despite intensive investigation we are not yet sure of the causes. Some areas of potential weakness in the primary ordnance circuit have been identified and remedial action is in hand. We plan to launch three further trial rounds from a submarine in July 1981. There will inevitably be delay to the first operational deployment, previously scheduled for mid-1981 (although initially with only a partial complement of missiles). Public statements on the matter have however been deliberately imprecise, so no new announcement is needed. We are now aiming at first deployment of a full tactical outload in March 1982. Whether we achieve this depends crucially on how the July trials go.

None of this has come to public notice. The US Government naturally knows of it, but we see no particular reason why it should come up when the Prime Minister visits Washington next month. If,

C A Whitmore Esq