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BRITISH NUCLEAR TEST PROGRAMME

In my minute of 2 October recommending that the Secretary of State should seek final approval to fire the next British nuclear test, I also advised that it would very shortly be necessary to make financial provision for the necessary work to enable us to have a further test in the Summer of 1979. As a result of correspondence earlier this year, the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and the Foreign Secretary are already aware that President Carter has agreed in principle to this latter test proceeding.

2. The test will explore an area of trigger technology new to British designers and, if successful, will greatly broaden our capability to design small "packagable" nuclear warheads which could be applied to a wide range of theatre or strategic delivery systems. The test will also be the first in which we can incorporate new and sophisticated diagnostic techniques which will greatly enhance its long-term value. In particular, the new measurements will help designers to interpret the sort of laboratory experiments which will provide the only new design data available during a CTBT. The great interest of the US laboratories in this UK test underlines its value in enlarging the scope of the existing close US/UK collaboration in nuclear warhead design, a collaboration which becomes doubly important in maintaining our design competence under a possible Test Ban régime.

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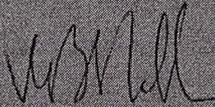
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3. The total cost of the test is expected to be of the order of £10M, with commitments up to this total being entered into progressively. My assessment of the present status of the CTB negotiations suggests that, if we can maintain the planned firing date of July 1979, it is most unlikely that it will be precluded by prior entry into force of a CTBT. In the unlikely event that firing is prevented by the Treaty, the hole would of course remain available to us for use at the end of the proposed three year duration. I understand that the Americans will be deliberately providing a small number of reserve holes so that they can resume their own test programme without delay. Although the present problems at Aldermaston remain unresolved, I consider the chance of their seriously affecting the test date to be acceptably small, and that we should proceed with the first stage preparations without delay.

4. I attach a draft letter to the Prime Minister and colleagues.



V H B Macklen
 DCA(PN)

23 October 1978