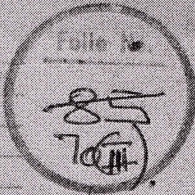


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Secretary of State (thro' PUS)

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Mr. Tolson	
Mr. Boardman	
Mr. Nichols	
Mr. Belmont	
Mr. Ladd	
Mr. Clegg	
Mr. Glavin	
Mr. Harbo	
Mr. Rosen	
Mr. Tracy	
Mr. Egan	
Mr. Gurnea	
Mr. Hendon	
Mr. Pennington	
Mr. Quinn	
Mr. Nease	
Miss Gandy	

BRITISH NUCLEAR TEST PROGRAMME

The time has now come for me to seek your final agreement to fire our next British nuclear test. Our device is already in Nevada, the emplacement hole is complete and the US Authorities are anxious to have our final political agreement. The timing of the test is currently 22 August weather permitting, but if I am given the go ahead in the next week or so the Americans wish to bring forward the firing date to 22 August if possible.

2. The preparations for this test were of course agreed by the last Government. The test itself is of particular importance to the UK in advancing the design of small, hard warheads suitable for delayed successor systems. It also incorporates some very advanced diagnostic and experimental techniques to maximum the amount of information we received from these tests.

3. Unless you see any objection we would propose to follow our normal routine for publicity on these occasions. That is, to give no prior information, but once the test has taken place to release the basic facts both in the States and London simultaneously. We prepare with the US an agreed brief Press Statement designed to cover all contingencies. I would, of course, separately report to you more fully on the preliminary results of the test.

4. If this test is successful, we should be well on the way to proving a British warhead design for a successor system, but CBT, permitting, we would need to be able to plan for at least two or three more tests to ensure that a successor warhead would have sufficient yield, to demonstrate a design for future flexible nuclear warheads, and a spare slot to act as an insurance against a test failure.

5. Preparations for underground tests at Nevada take about 9 months to a year. Deep holes (up to 1,000 feet and about 10 feet in diameter) have to be drilled by specialist teams, and the drilling teams are the bottle-neck in the preparations. With a CBT a possibility, the US are also running an extensive test programme and need to have the British requirements at an early date. In fact if we wish to test in mid-1956 the US have asked us to give a go ahead by end-July for the drilling preparations.

6. Besides the practical issues, the President has to give his political consent to the conduct of a UK test, and the US authorities who are seen to go forward with their programme, wish to prevent the likely UK test requirements at the same time. I would recommend that we ask the US to get Presidential agreement

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SECRET UK EYES A

to three more British nuclear tests. A weapon device test of this nature costs about £12M, excluding the cost of the device which is included in the intramural cost of the nuclear warhead programme. The payments to the US are staged, i.e. the US bill is roughly quarterly for work carried out by them for our programme. My nuclear estimates already include the full allowance for 1 test but in case a three year CBT becomes a reality by the end of 1980 I recommend that we should immediately ask the US to make preparations for two British tests in mid 1980 and commit the necessary money to pay for this US activity. If the Chancellor responds favourably to your letter of 20 June we should be able to find the necessary money from the Defence Budget. I consider we could delay the preparations for the third possible test until the early Autumn, by which time the results of the test in August this year will be available. If this were a failure the third test would become a necessity.

7. I therefore seek your approval for:
- a. authorising the Americans to complete the preparations for the current British test and to fire it this August;
 - b. ask the Americans to seek Presidential agreement in principle for 3 further British nuclear tests, probably to be held in 1980;
 - c. committing the money necessary for the US preparations for two British tests in mid 1980 at a total cost of about £24M;
 - d. reserving the request for preparations for the third test until the early Autumn.

It will of course be desirable for there to be an agreed UK position on our UK test requirement before you meet Harold Brown in July.

8. It has been the normal practice to seek the agreement of the Prime Minister, with copies to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Chancellor and possibly now the Home Secretary, of our test proposals, and I enclose a letter to No 10.

V H B Hacklen
V H B Hacklen
DOA(FH)

27 June 1979