

E.R.

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET ARTIFICER

ARTIFICER

and deployment of Super Antelope to provide the SSBN Force with the capability to penetrate ABM defences.

16. A decision to discontinue the operation of the UK SSBN Force would lead to a saving in excess of £40M a year (including £...M in dollars) on estimated future operating and support expenditure once the submarines had been phased out and savings in personnel would eventually accrue. More than half of the capacity of the armament depot at Coulport would no longer be required and the proposal to establish nuclear re-fitting capacity at Davenport Dockyard could be abandoned; these would lead to a further saving of £...M. It would, however, be necessary to retain the Faslane Base and the Rosyth Dockyard re-fitting facilities for hunter/killer nuclear submarines. Further expenditure on Polaris improvements, currently assessed at about £170M would clearly not be incurred though the savings would be some £10M less than this and would be spread over the next 6 years.

17. The prospects of such savings are attractive but the price would be the loss of the UK's special contribution to NATO; of the insurance against a future possible decrease in the credibility of the American nuclear umbrella; and of the ultimate guarantee of national security against a nuclear threat. It would leave France as the only Western European power. The UK position in NATO, in Europe, and in the world generally as a non-nuclear weapon state would be very different and would be weaker than if we had never possessed a strategic nuclear capability. It can be expected that NATO would seek a greater conventional contribution from the UK in compensation for the withdrawal

Page 8 of 13 Pages

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

ARTIFICER

DEFE 19/208

No

**TOP SECRET**

SSEW Force and of improving Polaris so that it could penetrate ABM defences have already been set out. This course would retain for the UK the strategic capabilities which have been available in one form or another for the past fifteen or more years. There would be a dip in these capabilities between the time when the Russians complete their ABM radar cover and the time when Super Antelope could enter service but the fact that it would be known to both our Allies and our potential enemies that steps to improve Polaris were being taken should be sufficient to maintain the credibility of a deterrent over this short interim period.

SUMMARY

20. The position may be summarised as follows:-

- a) The present force of four nuclear submarines equipped with Polaris A3F missiles currently provides an effective contribution to the NATO deterrent and an ultimate guarantee of UK security at an annual operating and support cost of £40M. It could be run on until the early 1990s although with increasing support difficulties and costs especially after the system is phased out of US Navy service, probably in the mid 1980s
- b) In the NATO context, the possession by the UK of a strategic nuclear force means that there is a second centre of decision on nuclear issues and hence an enhancement of the credibility of the NATO deterrent. In the national role, the SSEW

**TOP SECRET**

Page 10 of 13 Pages

TOP SECRET

**ARTIFICER**

TOP SECRET

Classification

ARTIFICAL

HR.

TOP SECRET ARTIFICAL

Force provides a deterrent to actions inimicable to the UK's vital interests; 2) insurance against a possible decrease in the credibility of the US nuclear umbrella; and the only means of preventing nuclear hegemony passing to France in Europe

c)

ATTACHMENT UNDER SECTION 9(4)

- d) The Polaris ABT system could be improved so as to counter ABM defences by adopting Super Antelope at a total estimated development and production cost of £235M. The feasibility and project definition phases for Super Antelope have been completed and development is proceeding on a series of six monthly authorisations. Of the total estimated cost, about £65M will have been spent or irretrievably committed by September, 1974
- e) The SSBN Force equipped with the Super Antelope improvement should satisfy the deterrence criteria in the face of the deployment by the Russians of exo-atmospheric ABM defences within the limits of the US/USSR Treaty on ABMs

Page 11 of 13 Pages

ARTIFICAL

TOP SECRET

Classification

53186/3  
DEFE 19/208