

Part 1 to COS 22nd Meeting/79  
dated 21 August 1979

to the UK criteria for a successor system, to possible system options and to numbers of missiles. In answer to an observation by Mr Aaron, it had been pointed out that an increase to 576 warheads (cf 140 Polaris) was in effect a hedge against the increasing capability of the Soviets. The US were clearly looking to a further meeting, probably in London next month, to discuss such matters as the implications for the Alliance of a British successor system and the likely effect on UK conventional capability of diverting resources to such a programme. MIRV and TERCOM would also be discussed further. Clear arguments would need to be put forward by the UK to aid the presentation of the subject by the US authorities at home and in negotiations with the Soviet Union in an arms control context.

4. Concluding, PROFESSOR MASON said that the US saw little difficulty in transferring MIRV technology but the same could not be said for TERCOM. On LRTNF, Mr Aaron had made it clear (5) that they hoped we would replace the Vulcan in this role and that they did not regard TORNADO with WE177 as a contributor to LRTNF.

5. SIR FRANK COOPER (Permanent Under Secretary of State) said that in US eyes the linkage between a British successor system and SALT was very clear. It would be necessary for the UK to narrow the system options before the next meeting when, among other things, the US would wish to look more carefully at our criteria and the justification for what was a proposed four-fold increase in the number of warheads compared with our present Polaris force. By mid-September he hoped that the likely costs of our tentative nuclear programme would be estimated with more confidence. He believed there would be considerable problems however in costing certain elements, for example submarine construction and storage facilities. Minimising the UK research and development on nuclear systems would help to reduce costs, however, he advised against taking piecemeal decisions on elements of the nuclear programme until the whole spectrum had been examined and costed more fully.

6. SIR EDWIN BRAMALL said that he supported the general trend of the commentary (2) and could agree to its use as an expression of their views with one important qualification. The commentary held that funding a successor system could disrupt the defence programme, however, in another context (4) they had been advised that the costs could be contained.

Notes:

2. Attachment to COS 1200/901A dated 13 August 1979.
3. Washington Tel No 2346 of 17 August refers.
4. D/DS1/510/21/1 dated 17 August 1979.

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The true situation should be determined. He wondered if the individual Service Department programme enhancements, cost escalation and the revised PESC Baseline had been taken into account. He would not wish to dispute the previously agreed priority to be given to a successor system, however, the true penalties should be identified. In abandoning MC 14/2 the Alliance had consciously raised the nuclear threshold for good reasons. To lower that threshold to finance a successor system would be a high price to pay and we should continue to argue for extra funding to avoid this.

7. In discussion the following points were made:

a. The matter remained politically most sensitive both here and in the US. Security would need to be maintained and great care would be needed in the presentation of the case for a successor system to the public. Security would to some extent inhibit the refinement of costs.

b. The UK independent nuclear deterrent was the foundation upon which our defence policy stood and it justified the expenditure of 6-7% of the defence budget. However, the opportunity costs in terms of conventional capability should be taken into account.

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8. Summing up their further discussion of the proposed amendments (5) to the commentary SIR NEIL CAMERON said that they would wish to instruct their Secretary to revise the paper in the light of the views they had expressed and to circulate, for their clearance out of Committee by 7 September 1979, a draft submission under which they could forward the commentary to the Secretary of State. (Secretary's Note: The revised commentary and draft submission at attachments 2 and 3). They would wish the submission to go forward together with that based on DP 16/79.

8. The Chiefs of Staff agreed with the remarks of the Chief of the Defence Staff in his summing up.

Attachments:

1. Consolidated Amendment List to COS 1260/910A dated 13 August 1979 (2 pages).
2. The Future of the UK Nuclear Deterrent - A Commentary (15 pages).
3. Draft Submission to the Secretary of State (2 pages).

Note:

5. Attachment 1.

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