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C.C. (62)
76th Conclusions

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CABINET

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at Admiralty House, S.W. 1, on Friday, 21st December, 1962, at 10 a.m.

Present :

The Right Hon. R. A. BUTLER, M.P., First Secretary of State (<i>in the Chair</i>)	
The Right Hon. VISCOUNT HAILSHAM, Q.C., Lord President of the Council	The Right Hon. LORD DILHORNE, Lord Chancellor
The Right Hon. REGINALD MAUDLING, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer	The Right Hon. HENRY BROOKE, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department
The Right Hon. JOHN HARE, M.P., Minister of Labour	The Right Hon. EDWARD HEATH, M.P., Lord Privy Seal
The Right Hon. ERNEST MARPLES, M.P., Minister of Transport	The Right Hon. CHRISTOPHER SOAMES, M.P., Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
The Right Hon. FREDERICK ERROLL, M.P., President of the Board of Trade	The Right Hon. JOHN BOYD-CARPENTER, M.P., Chief Secretary to the Treasury and Paymaster General
The Right Hon. J. ENOCH POWELL, M.P., Minister of Health	The Right Hon. Sir EDWARD BOYLE, M.P., Minister of Education
The Right Hon. Sir KEITH JOSEPH, M.P., Minister of Housing and Local Government and Minister for Welsh Affairs	The Right Hon. WILLIAM DEEDES, M.P., Minister without Portfolio

The following were also present :

The Right Hon. LORD CARRINGTON, First Lord of the Admiralty	The Right Hon. JOHN PROFUMO, M.P., Secretary of State for War
The Right Hon. JULIAN AMERY, M.P., Minister of Aviation	The Right Hon. HUGH FRASER, M.P., Secretary of State for Air
The Right Hon. MARTIN REDMAYNE, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury	

Secretariat :

Mr. A. L. M. CARY
Mr. N. J. ABERCROMBIE

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Nuclear
Weapons

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*The Cabinet had before them four telegrams from the Prime Minister (Nassau telegrams Nos. Codel 16, 17, 18 and 24 of 20th December, 1962) on the action to be taken following the decision of the President of the United States to cancel plans for the development of the airborne ballistic missile SKYBOLT for use by the United States. The action proposed included the provision of POLARIS missiles to be carried in United Kingdom submarines. The Prime Minister had asked for the advice of the Cabinet on the question whether the terms of a proposed joint statement in his own name and that of the President were acceptable.

The First Secretary of State drew attention to the principal differences between the United States draft in telegram No. Codel 16 and the subsequent joint draft in telegram No. Codel 18 which had been elaborated in further discussion on 20th December and on which the advice of the Cabinet was now sought. It was clear that a great deal had been achieved by the Prime Minister and his colleagues in Nassau in persuading the President to move away from the original United States positions. Whereas the United States draft would have committed the United Kingdom Government to "an agreement to meet their NATO non-nuclear force goals at the agreed NATO standards", the latest draft referred only to "agreement on the importance of increasing the effectiveness of their conventional forces". Again, the latest draft included a new provision that our strategic nuclear forces would be used for "the international defence of the Western Alliance in all circumstances except where Her Majesty's Government may decide that the supreme national interests are at stake". The Prime Minister had particularly directed attention (in telegram No. Codel 24) to these words, which had the effect of giving us the sole right of decision on the use of our strategic nuclear forces, and had asked whether the Cabinet endorsed the view, which he shared with the Foreign Secretary, the Commonwealth Secretary and the Minister of Defence, that these words could be publicly defended as maintaining an independent United Kingdom contribution to the nuclear deterrent.

The Cabinet accordingly considered first the wording of this passage in the statement. There was some doubt whether, as it stood, the exception would be generally interpreted as allowing Her Majesty's Government to use United Kingdom strategic forces in circumstances not involving the defence of the Western Alliance, or whether it would be taken to mean only that the Government could decline to use those forces in particular circumstances involving the interests of the Alliance. It was clear that the Prime Minister intended the exception to cover both cases. If he were free to make this interpretation public, with the consent of the President, this would safeguard the principle of independence; but there would be advantage in clarifying the terms of the statement and removing the ambiguity, if this could be done without jeopardising United States agreement to the other features of the arrangement proposed. This was especially important in view of Western European opinion. We might easily suffer from the growth of a suspicion that our military independence was, or might be, less secure than, for example, that of the French. Again, as no early opportunity could be found for Parliamentary discussion of the joint statement, this was an additional reason for seeking to ensure that the terms of the statement itself were free from doubt. In any case some public explanation would be called for before Parliament reassembled. An alternative form of words was suggested, emphasising first the right of Her Majesty's Government to act in accordance with the supreme national interest, subject to which United Kingdom strategic nuclear forces would only be used in defence of the Alliance.

* Previously recorded in a Confidential Annex.

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While Ministers were agreed upon the value to this country of an arrangement by which we should eventually have within our own control a virtually indestructible second-strike deterrent weapon of proven capability, and with prospects of a long life, it was recognised that the conditions which the United States Government were stipulating represented a heavy price in money and otherwise.

The First Lord of the Admiralty informed the Cabinet that a force of POLARIS-firing nuclear submarines could be built for the Royal Navy in either of two ways. Four submarines each equipped with 16 missiles could be completed between early 1968 and 1970, providing a full deterrent during 1969; this was estimated to cost £220 million over a period of seven years, including the necessary missiles, but excluding the cost of research and development of a United Kingdom warhead. Alternatively, seven submarines each equipped with eight missiles could be completed over a period of 11 years, providing a full deterrent in the course of 1971, at a total cost of £290 million. In both cases it might be reasonable to reckon a saving of £100 million on SKYBOLT as offsetting the cost of the submarines: in the latter alternative of eight-missile submarines, these vessels would be able to perform the full military role of seven nuclear-powered submarines in the conventional fleet, in addition to their deterrent function. On this basis, the extra cost of the missile-firing capability of the seven submarines would be £95 million.

There was no mention in the telegrams under examination of any arrangement for hiring United States submarines, or otherwise bridging the gap which would occur in our deterrent forces after the V-bomber force armed with BLUE STEEL began to diminish in effectiveness in the latter half of the current decade. It thus appeared that expenditure on the V-bomber force might continue unabated during the period of construction of United Kingdom POLARIS-firing submarines. Furthermore, United States pressure for improvement in the effectiveness of conventional forces was likely to lead to increased United Kingdom expenditure.

In the absence of any reliable estimate of the total financial and economic consequences involved, *the Chancellor of the Exchequer* said that he must reserve his position about the implications for defence expenditure as a whole of a decision to accept a United Kingdom deterrent based on POLARIS.

In the course of further discussion, reference was made to the likelihood of public criticism of the Government's acceptance of a period of some years during which the possibility of effective action by United Kingdom strategic nuclear forces would be seriously diminished. Responsible opinion was also likely to take the point that the proposed arrangement included our acceptance of the idea of a multilateral strategic nuclear force for the North Atlantic Alliance, which was a new and untried concept. Coupled with insistence on the need to improve the effectiveness, which would be taken to mean the size, of our conventional forces in Europe, there was at least a possible risk that, before the time came when we were ready to accept POLARIS missiles for our submarines, the United States Administration would make use of alleged shortcomings in our policy towards the North Atlantic Alliance as an excuse for defaulting on their offer.

The Chief Secretary, Treasury, invited attention to the fact that the proposed joint statement appeared to exclude any consideration of the fitting of POLARIS missiles in surface ships. While this method would not have the advantages of submarine operation, and although any technical effort expended in this direction would mean a delay in the fulfilment of the submarine programme, surface ships could probably be made ready earlier and cheaper than submarines.

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While the wording of the passage about conventional forces in telegram No. Codel 18 represented a very great improvement on the wording earlier proposed by the United States in telegram No. Codel 16, it could be further improved if the idea were introduced that the effectiveness of our conventional forces ought to be increased "on a world-wide basis": without some such addition it would be widely misunderstood as necessarily implying an increase in the strength of the British Army of the Rhine, which would be very difficult to achieve. This passage of the proposed joint statement was also unsatisfactory in that it gave currency to a new (and probably unsound) United States strategic doctrine of a "nuclear shield" and a "non-nuclear sword".

Summing up the discussion *the First Secretary of State* said that there seemed to be general agreement in the Cabinet that the Prime Minister and his colleagues deserved their full support for the largely successful efforts that they had made to evolve a satisfactory agreement with the United States Government. In conveying the sense of this feeling to the Prime Minister it would however be right to emphasise their view that the Government were being asked to pay a heavy price and that for this reason the independent role of Her Majesty's Government in the use of nuclear forces must be clearly and unambiguously expressed. The wording of the relevant passage in the joint statement could in their view be improved in order to make the Prime Minister's own interpretation of it plainer. On conventional forces, while the substance of the proposed joint statement was unexceptionable, certain changes of wording might be recommended to avoid subsequent difficulty in application. It would be necessary to inform the Prime Minister of the reservation which the Chancellor of the Exchequer had made. As there would be no opportunity to explain the new arrangement in Parliament for a month, it would be right to inform the Prime Minister of the views which had been expressed about the form which criticism of the arrangements might take in responsible quarters, and of the need for some earlier and fuller exposition of the Government's policy than would be conveyed by the statement itself.

The Cabinet—

- (1) Agreed that the Prime Minister should be assured of their full support in his endeavours to secure a satisfactory statement.
- (2) Agreed that the draft in telegram No. Codel 18, if interpreted on the lines of telegram No. Codel 24, safeguarded the essential principle of an independent United Kingdom contribution to the Western strategic nuclear deterrent, but that the wording as it stood was open to misinterpretation.
- (3) Took note that the First Secretary of State would arrange for the Prime Minister to be advised of their views on this point, and of the other points made in their discussion.

*Cabinet Office, S.W. 1,
21st December, 1962.*