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Printed for the Cabinet. July 1963

C.C. (63)
50th Conclusions

Copy No. 44

CABINET

*CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at Admiralty House, S.W. 1,
on Tuesday, 30th July, 1963, at 11.30 a.m.*

Present :

The Right Hon. HAROLD MACMILLAN, M.P., Prime Minister

The Right Hon. R. A. BUTLER, M.P., First Secretary of State	The Right Hon. THE EARL OF HOME, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs
The Right Hon. VISCOUNT HAILSHAM, Q.C., Lord President of the Council and Minister for Science	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. DUNCAN SANDYS, M.P., Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations and Secretary of State for the Colonies	The Right Hon. IAIN MACLEOD, M.P., Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
The Right Hon. PETER THORNEYCROFT, M.P., Minister of Defence	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. MICHAEL NOBLE, M.P., Secretary of State for Scotland
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. JULIAN AMERY, M.P., Minister of Aviation
The Right Hon. HUGH FRASER, M.P., Secretary of State for Air	The Right Hon. JOSEPH GODBER, M.P., Secretary of State for War
The Right Hon. MARTIN REDMAYNE, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury	Admiral of the Fleet The Right Hon. THE EARL MOUNTBATTEN OF BURMA, Chief of the Defence Staff
Admiral of the Fleet Sir CASPAR JOHN, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff	General Sir RICHARD HULL, Chief of the Imperial General Staff

Marshal of the Royal Air Force, Sir
THOMAS PIKE, Chief of the Air Staff

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Secretariat :
Sir BURKE TREND
Mr. A. L. M. CARY
Mr. P. A. WILKINSON



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**Future
Defence
Policy**

1. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Minister of Defence (C. (63) 141) on the aircraft carrier programme.

Aircraft Carrier
Programme
(Previous
Reference:
C.C. (63) 48th
Conclusions,
Minute 3)

The Minister of Defence said that in the course of their last discussion on this subject the Cabinet had invited him to provide further information on certain practical questions affecting an aircraft carrier replacement on which doubts had been expressed. He hoped that, in the light of the reassurances contained in C. (63) 141, the Cabinet would now accept the need to build one new carrier. A fleet of three carriers was the minimum required to support our present strategy during the 1970s; but, if one new carrier were not built, the carrier fleet in the 1970s would be reduced to two vessels and it would become impossible to maintain a realistic military presence east of Suez.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that he still doubted the wisdom of basing our plans on the assumption that we should find it necessary and practicable to maintain our present strategic roles unaltered throughout the 1970s. Nevertheless, he accepted that there could be no question of abandoning any major role at present and that a definite decision not to build another carrier would be interpreted as implying that we were preparing to abandon our military position east of Suez. But while, on this basis, he would be prepared to agree that a decision to build another carrier should now be taken and announced, it would be necessary to make it clear that the new carrier would replace the second, not the first, of the two older existing carriers to be withdrawn from service. By 1971, H.M.S. *Victorious* would be 30 years old; H.M.S. *Ark Royal*, on the other hand, had been commissioned in 1955 and, by 1971, would be only 16 years old. It should therefore be possible to extend the effective life of H.M.S. *Ark Royal* well into the 1970s; and the building dates for the new carrier could be correspondingly deferred.

In discussion the following main points were made:

(a) Although H.M.S. *Victorious* had been completed in 1941, she had undergone a major modernisation in the mid-1950s. It was only as a result of that modernisation that it had been possible to extend her life to 1971. It was not proposed, however, to modernise H.M.S. *Ark Royal*, since the results would not justify the cost. By about 1972, therefore, H.M.S. *Ark Royal* would have completed as lengthy service as H.M.S. *Victorious* at the time of the latter's modernisation and would have reached the end of her effective life.

(b) Although it would be desirable, at the appropriate stage, to test the applicability of nuclear propulsion to warships, it would be unwise to adopt this experimental technique for the first time in relation to so vital a defence requirement as the new carrier.

The Cabinet—

- (1) Agreed that the aircraft carrier fleet should be maintained at a level of three ships during the 1970s.
- (2) Agreed that a new aircraft carrier should be built to replace H.M.S. *Ark Royal*.
- (3) Authorised the Minister of Defence to announce these decisions in a statement in Parliament that day.
- (4) Invited the Minister of Defence, in consultation with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to give further consideration to the dates at which it would be necessary to place orders to give effect to the decision recorded at Conclusion (2) above.

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Nuclear Tests
(Previous Reference: C.C. (63) 47th Conclusions, Minute 2)

2. *The Prime Minister* said that the Cabinet would wish to convey to the Lord President of the Council their congratulations on the successful outcome of the recent negotiations between the Governments of the United Kingdom, the United States and the Soviet Union on the conclusion of a treaty to prohibit the testing of nuclear weapons and to express to him their warm appreciation of the valuable part which he himself had played in these negotiations.

The Cabinet—

Took note, with approval, of the Prime Minister's statement.

*Cabinet Office, S.W. 1,
30th July, 1963.*