



(c) crown copyright

THIS DOCUMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF HER BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

Printed for the Cabinet. February 1958

C (58) 41

Copy No. 56

20th February, 1958

CABINET**BALLISTIC MISSILES****MEMORANDUM BY SECRETARY OF STATE FOR AIR**

I have been invited by the Home Affairs Committee to report to the Cabinet certain points about the deployment of American ballistic rockets (Thor) in this country (H.A. (58) 3rd Minutes, Item 1). These points will bear directly on certain aspects of the Minister of Defence's statement to the House of Commons about the Agreement on this subject with the United States Government.

2. The American Government want to keep to a timetable under which the first of the five sites needed for the first squadron should be ready for its three missiles by July 1958 and the fifth site by the end of the year. This paper is written on the assumption that we keep to these dates whatever arrangements are made about the manning of the first squadron.

3. The Home Affairs Committee approved in principle that the details of this deployment should be kept secret. Though we may be criticised for classifying as secret a weapon which when established will very often be clearly visible, we should be making a present of intelligence a long time before the last weapon is deployed if we revealed the detailed location of sites now. There are still stronger security objections against revealing such details as the relationships between sites and the system of command and control. Finally, it would be quite wrong to give the deployment of Thor, which is a nuclear weapon, a lesser security classification than that of other R.A.F. weapons.

4. To prevent publication of details in the Press it is necessary to issue a "D" Notice and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has asked me to bring the attached draft, which the Home Affairs Committee have approved, to the Cabinet. If we take this action with our own Press it is clearly essential that we should ensure that the United States Government and the United States Air Force do not adopt a different security policy in respect of Thor. Action is being taken with Washington on this point.

5. A decision on secrecy would have a considerable effect on what action we take to consult local authorities and private interests. I have discussed the position with the Attorney-General.

6. On the one hand there is the Government's policy, emphasised by the Franks Committee, of giving local interests affected by a proposal by a Defence Department to acquire or to exercise rights over land, even when secret, every reasonable opportunity to object and have enquiries made into their objections (Cmnd. 218). Although this policy does not directly apply to this case because we shall be using active or inactive airfields which already belong to us, it could be argued that the spirit of our policy requires a procedure for hearing objections. The siting of rockets on inactive airfields in particular will constitute a change of use. And, provided security considerations do not arise, local opinion would normally be granted a hearing. On the other hand this project has certain special features; there is no room for manoeuvre as regards the detailed location of sites

SECRET

2

which are fixed by complicated operational criteria once the broad area is settled and it would be contrary to British and American practice to pinpoint the location of nuclear weapons.

7. In my view not only is the normal procedure of full consultation inapplicable in this case but so is the more limited procedure, which we usually apply to secret projects, of informing selected representatives of the County authority concerned, which in fact gives them a chance to comment. The reasons are, firstly, that if we tell them the detailed sites they will know more than we are proposing to tell Parliament. This has been done in the past, but this project is attracting exceptional political and Press interest, and I think we would be criticised if we took this step. Secondly, if we inform County authorities no useful purpose would be served except for the ventilation of objections. We would not be able to satisfy them and would only irritate still more people as, for example, local residents. The Attorney-General agrees with me on this. I would however propose, as a matter of courtesy and good relations, to inform the Chairmen of the County Councils concerned that there will be a site or sites in their counties. This could be timed to coincide with the Government's announcement.

8. I think the right course would be to make as full a statement as possible to Parliament about our policy for deploying these weapons, in which we explain that the sites are being carefully selected in the light of a number of complex considerations, that they will all be on land already owned by the Air Ministry and that they will be in certain counties which we would list. We should also stress that there is no question of launching these weapons in peacetime or even of test firing the rocket motors at these sites. It is for consideration whether we say in the main statement, or reserve for supplementary answer, that because of these many factors and because we have taken every possible step to minimise interference with land, local interests, &c., the Government have decided that consultation with county or local authorities would not be appropriate.

9. As to the cost the broad sum is really determined by the main agreement between the two Governments. But there are important points of application. Firstly the money allowed in Air Estimates for 1958-59 is based on an earlier and slower American timetable of deployment and amounts to only £350,000. Secondly the actual sum we shall spend in the coming financial year can be varied by two factors. If we do not consult local authorities we shall be able to get an earlier start. If we use such practices as multi-shift working and schedule contracts, they will increase the cost of the work.

10. The increase in cost due to these accelerated measures would not be great. They will apply only to the operational part of the work and within that part might involve an increase of between 10 per cent. and 25 per cent. They will be required only for the first squadron and to a lesser degree the second squadron. If we take these special measures and if we do not consult local authorities—and both these decisions are necessary to keep to the timetable of deployment requested by the Americans—the actual expenditure incurred in 1958-59 might on Air Votes amount to about £1.5 millions. There is no scope in my Works vote, which has already been severely pruned in spite of our policy to improve standards of accommodation, for finding this additional expenditure.

11. I recommend that we should take these accelerated measures for the deployment of the first squadron and to a lesser degree for the deployment of the second squadron. I am confident that the work for the third and fourth squadrons can be carried out by normal fixed price contract without any multi-shift working.

12. Expenditure also falls on the G.P.O. for the provision of the considerable telecommunications network required. The Postmaster General is, I understand, satisfied that this work can be carried out in accordance with the tight time-table provided that it can be given priority in the military field. I can accept this condition. I am also informed that the Post Office are satisfied that the expenditure which they may incur in the forthcoming year, amounting to up to £100,000, can be found out of their existing Estimates.

I therefore recommend that:—

- (a) the deployment of Thor should be treated as secret: that appropriate instructions should be issued to the Press and that close liaison should be kept with the American Government;

SECRET

SECRET

3

- (b) in the light of the many special factors about this deployment there should not be the normal system of consultation with local authorities and private interests affected but that there should be a full statement in Parliament supplemented by a personal letter from me to the Chairmen of the County Councils concerned;
- (c) all necessary financial and contractual measures should be taken to get the first squadron installed by the planned date but that I should revert so far as possible to the normal fixed price contract for the remaining squadrons.

G. R. W.

*Air Ministry, S.W. 1.**18th February, 1958.*

ANNEX

BALLISTIC MISSILES

Draft "D" Notice

I am directed by the Service, Press and Broadcasting Committee to inform you that from time to time the Government will make official announcements on the subject of sites in the United Kingdom concerned with the operation of ballistic missiles, with a view to giving as much information as security allows. This information may include broad geographical reference, by country or area, to the general locations of such sites.

2. I am to request you, in the interests of national security, not to add to this factual information by publishing the number, precise localities or general layouts of, or operational relationships between, any sites in the United Kingdom concerned with the operation of these missiles. Finally you are asked not to refer, in such a way as to impart information on these same matters, to any surveys being made of such sites.

SECRET