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BO 6792/QM0144

Briefs for Incoming Administration
(Papers for June 1983)

QM 0144

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STRICTLY FOR THE PERSONAL INFORMATION AND USE OF THE PRIME MINISTER....

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PRIME MINISTER

NUCLEAR RELEASE PROCEDURES AND RELATED MATTERS

This submission describes those aspects of our nuclear procedures which you need to approve or know about as Prime Minister.

Weapons Available

2. I attach at Annex A a note on the nuclear weapons in service with the Armed Forces. All are assigned to NATO, though we have the ability, should the need ever arise, to use most of them in a national role.

Release Procedures

3. Any decision to authorise the release of British nuclear weapons would be subject to the closest political control. If possible, this would be exercised collectively by Ministers, after consultation as appropriate with the President of the United States, the Federal German Chancellor, and our own military commanders. In circumstances in which this process of consultation and discussion was physically impossible, you would have to act on behalf of the Government.

4. In normal circumstances control of nuclear release would be exercised by you from the Cabinet Office Briefing Room, which is equipped with special facilities for this purpose. If you agree, I should like to arrange for you to have a short presentation there explaining the facilities and procedures.

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5. In the single, defined circumstance that nuclear weapons have actually burst on this country, and political authority to release RAF aircraft for retaliation cannot be obtained along established channels (which are defined in his Directive), the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, RAF Strike Command, has standing delegation authority to order nuclear retaliation on his own responsibility. The reason for this exception is that the survival of the tactical bomber force can only be achieved by ordering it into the air, after which its ability to retaliate is limited in time by its relatively short endurance. The invulnerability of Polaris submarines makes it unnecessary to delegate equivalent authority to the Commander-in-Chief, Fleet.

6. Certain British forces (Strike Command Nimrods, and Lance missiles and dual-capable artillery in Germany) are equipped to use American-owned warheads. The direct control of the Prime Minister does not extend to these systems, but their use is governed by the understandings on joint decision (paragraph 6b. below) in the case of the Nimrods, and the more general understanding on consultation (paragraph 6a.) in the case of Lance and dual-capable artillery.

Consultation

7. There are two key understandings with the United States Government about the release of American nuclear weapons -

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a. A general understanding that the United States will consult the United Kingdom before using nuclear weapons anywhere, if possible. This is contained in an undertaking that "the United States would, in the event of increased tension or the threat of war take every possible step to consult with Britain and other allies". In practice this undertaking has to be regarded as effective only if time permits; it calls for consultation and not for joint decision.

b. A specific understanding which covers all forces equipped with United States nuclear weapons and operating from bases in the United Kingdom

Such forces include units of the United States Strategic Air Command, units of RAF Strike Command (when equipped with American nuclear weapons), United States forces in the United Kingdom which are assigned or earmarked for assignment to a NATO Commander, United States Polaris and Poseidon submarines in United Kingdom territorial waters and

The understanding requires a joint decision before such forces use nuclear weapons.

8. On British initiative, the arrangements for implementing these understandings were recently reviewed, revised and clarified by Mrs Thatcher and President Reagan in the light of the proposed deployment of cruise missiles to this country. They are now enshrined in a secret document known as the Wright-Eagleburger Agreement. This secret agreement, and a note on correspondence between the Presidents and Prime Ministers, including the most recent letters of reaffirmation of the current undertakings, are at Annexes B and C respectively. At the time of review of the arrangements, the President agreed that in the light of increased public scepticism as to their efficiency, British Ministers could be more explicit in public about the precise nature of the arrangements than the Americans had hitherto been willing to countenance. Accordingly, Mrs Thatcher answered a written question on the subject from Mr Anthony Buck on 12 May 1983, saying "... The effect of these arrangements is that no nuclear weapon would be fired or launched from British territory without the agreement of the British Prime Minister." The full text is at Annex D.

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[For an incoming Labour Prime Minister

10. The Manifesto commitment is to secure the removal of all American nuclear bases from this country as part of the process of moving to a non-nuclear defence policy. Clearly this will take some time. It has been the practice to reaffirm the Anglo-American understandings on the control of American nuclear weapons in this country on a change of President and Prime Minister, and I recommend that this ought to be done without too much delay if you are

to be assured that joint decision will apply to American nuclear weapons while they remain in this country. If you plan to make an early visit to Washington you could confirm the agreements with the President then. If not I suggest that I let the Americans know that you are ready to confirm the understandings and suitable messages can then be prepared for you and President Reagan to exchange.

For an Alliance Prime Minister

10. It has been the practice to reaffirm these understandings on a change of President or Prime Minister, and clearly this ought to be done without too much delay. If you plan to make an early visit to Washington, you and he could confirm the agreements then. If not, I suggest that I let the Americans know that you are ready to reconfirm the understandings and suitable messages can then be prepared for you and President Reagan to exchange.]

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12. There is also a bilateral agreement between the United Kingdom and the Federal Republic of Germany that British nuclear weapons in Germany would only be used on the basis of the agreed NATO strategy and under the control of SACEUR. The Agreement (details of which are at Annex E) provides that the Prime Minister will consult the Chancellor before authority is given for the release of British nuclear weapons stored in West Germany. We have discussed with the Germans in the past whether we and they should, as a regular practice, reaffirm the Agreement whenever a new Prime Minister or Chancellor takes office, but they do not think that this is necessary. It is, however, important to keep knowledge of this Agreement alive in both capitals and I think that there would be advantage in our letting the Germans know that you have been made aware of the Memorandum of Understanding.

NATO

13. Arrangements for consultation within NATO on the use of nuclear weapons by United States and United Kingdom forces are based on the guidelines agreed by the North Atlantic Council at Athens in 1962. The Athens guidelines foresaw that the Council would expect adequate time for consultation about the use of nuclear weapons in response to a full-scale attack by Soviet conventional forces but that in the event of a full-scale Soviet nuclear attack on NATO the possibilities for consultation would be extremely limited. The United States and United Kingdom undertook, if time permitted, to consult the North Atlantic Council concerning the use of nuclear weapons anywhere in the world. Therefore, whilst provision is made for political consultation if time permits, nuclear release could take place without multilateral international consultation.

14. The use of British nuclear weapons, or of British-delivered American weapons by major NATO Commanders, is governed by NATO consultation arrangements which are an extension of the Athens guidelines. Under these arrangements a request by one of the Major NATO Commanders for the release of nuclear weapons would be conveyed to all member Governments and to the NATO Council. Their views would, if time permitted, be conveyed to the nuclear powers (United States and United Kingdom) who would communicate their decision to the major NATO Commander, the member Governments, and the Council. The Prime Minister's consultations with the President and the Federal Chancellor would be taking place in parallel.

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Nuclear Deputies

15. It is possible that circumstances could arise where you might not be available immediately to make the necessary decision on the use of nuclear weapons. It has been the practice in the past therefore for the Prime Minister to designate in peacetime up to three Ministers as his Deputies with authority to act on his behalf should he not be available. The intention is that after formal appointment by the Prime Minister during a period of rising tension, the First Deputy would take post in Whitehall and be ready to cover any unavoidable absence of the Prime Minister. The Second Deputy would move on the Prime Minister's instructions to the headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief, Fleet, at Northwood and assume authority if contact with the Prime Minister and First Deputy were lost. If a Third Deputy is appointed he would remain in London ready to take the place of the First or Second Deputy if, for any reason either of them was not available. [For Labour Administration. During the last Labour Administration the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Healey) was designated as the First Nuclear Deputy and the Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Mulley) was designated as the Second. There was no Third Deputy. [Should you consider designating the holders of the same appointments you may wish to bear in mind that this could result in the Secretary of State for Defence having to leave Whitehall at a crucial moment and you might prefer therefore to make him the First Nuclear Deputy, or possibly the Third so that he did not have to leave London]]. If you are generally content with these arrangements and once you have decided on the number of deputies and who should be appointed, I will prepare draft minutes to the Deputies for your approval.

Dispersal of Central Government

16. Plans exist which would enable Ministers to decide, if they so wished, on the dispersal of groups (known as PEBBLE groups) of Ministers and officials during a period of tension or conventional war before a strategic nuclear attack. Each PEBBLE group would be an embryo central Government, headed by a senior Minister.

If London were destroyed, the senior surviving Minister would take over the surviving central Government, and arrangements have been made for him to exercise control of the Polaris force at sea if neither you nor one of the Nuclear Deputies survived.

17. I will submit in due course for your approval a revised list of contingent Ministerial appointments to the PEBBLE groups. Individuals are not informed in peacetime of their selection.

Last Resort

18. There remains the question of "last resort", namely the procedures to be applied if this country were attacked in circumstances where the normal NATO command arrangements were ineffective for whatever reason and all organised Government was destroyed, for example by a "bolt from the blue" nuclear attack which neither the Deputies nor the PEBBLE groups survived. This is not a situation easily provided for, but the argument is that if we do not provide for it - and should the Russians discover the fact - we do not have a deterrent which is credible in all circumstances. Present instructions to our Polaris submarine commanders are that if there have been indications of a nuclear attack on the United Kingdom or if all Polaris and other naval broadcasts transmitted from the United Kingdom have been silent for four hours, then a sealed envelope held by each submarine is to be opened. This envelope contains further instructions from the Commander-in-Chief, Fleet, which lays down the conditions under which another sealed envelope containing specific instructions from the Prime Minister should be opened. Mrs Thatcher's orders cease to be operative and I should like to discuss this matter with you, with a view to obtaining your decision on what the last resort orders should be.

Summary

19. To sum up, I should be grateful for your agreement that:
- a. The understandings with the United States should be confirmed (paragraphs 7-11).
 - b. We should inform the Federal German Government that you are aware of the understanding with them (paragraph 12).
 - c. You should designate up to three Ministers as your First, Second and Third Nuclear Deputies (paragraph 15).
 - d. I should raise with you orally, at a convenient moment, the question of your last resort orders (paragraph 18).
 - e. A presentation should be arranged for you in the Cabinet Office Briefing Room on the facilities and procedures for the control of nuclear release (paragraph 4).

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

June 1983

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ANNEX A

BRITISH NUCLEAR FORCES

All 3 of the Services operate nuclear delivery systems. Current forces and equipment are as follows -

- a. Polaris. The Polaris strategic deterrent force comprises 4 submarines of which at least one is always on patrol. Their American-manufactured missiles have British warheads. The missiles are allocated to, and normally targeted by, the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR) as part of his General Strike Plan, but they can be redirected before launching to targets in the National Retaliatory War Plan (NRWP). The submarines are under the command of the United Kingdom Commander-in-Chief, Fleet, who is the 'executing Commander' under SACEUR.
- b. Royal Air Force Strike Aircraft. The United Kingdom-based Tornado and Buccaneer forces are equipped with British nuclear weapons. The Tornado are allocated to SACEUR and the Buccaneers to both SACEUR and SACLANT. Buccaneer and Tornado forces have alternative NRWP targets.
- c. Royal Air Force Germany. Jaguar and Buccaneer aircraft stationed in Germany are equipped with British nuclear weapons and are allocated to SACEUR.
- d. Royal Air Force Maritime Aircraft. Nimrod aircraft based in the United Kingdom are equipped to carry American depth bombs. They are allocated SACLANT and CINCCHAN, and have only NATO roles.
- e. Shipborne aircraft. Anti-submarine helicopters and Sea Harriers aircraft operating from surface ships are armed with British nuclear depth bombs. These forces are allocated to SACLANT.
- f. Battlefield weapons in BAOR. The British army in Germany is equipped with nuclear delivery systems (Lance missiles and dual-capable artillery) which use exclusively American warheads. All are allocated to SACEUR.

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PROCEDURAL UNDERSTANDINGS ON THE RELEASE FOR USE OF UNITED STATES NUCLEAR WEAPONS BASED IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

1. Concerted procedures of the two governments for reaching a decision to respond to a Soviet attack by committing nuclear retaliatory forces to the attack from the United Kingdom were agreed in the Murphy-Dean Agreement of June 7 1958. Sir Oliver Wright and the Honorable Lawrence S Eagleburger have met in Washington with the objective of reaffirming the basic procedures in the Murphy-Dean Agreement and updating its content to reflect weapons modernisation and administrative changes since 1958.

2. The basic understanding between the United Kingdom and United States Governments, regarding the use of bases in the United Kingdom by United States forces, provides that such use in an emergency shall be a matter for joint decision by the two governments in the light of circumstances at the time. This understanding has been reaffirmed whenever the Office of the United States President or British Prime Minister has changed hands, and it was most recently reaffirmed by President Reagan and Mrs Thatcher on February 27 1981.

3. That understanding provides that the President and Prime Minister will reach a joint decision by speaking personally with each other before certain forces equipped with United States nuclear weapons and based in the United Kingdom will use nuclear weapons.

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4. For Western retaliation to be successful, the procedures for commitment of these forces must assure the minimum delay.

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5. Specifically, it is agreed that the President and Prime Minister will reach a joint decision by speaking personally with each other before nuclear weapons for the following systems are released for use:

- A. Nuclear-armed, ground-launched United States cruise missiles based in the United Kingdom:
- B. Nuclear-armed United States aircraft operating from the United Kingdom
- C. Nuclear-armed missiles on United States submarines in United Kingdom territorial waters:
and
- D. United Kingdom aircraft carrying United States nuclear weapons.

6. Deployment away from their bases of nuclear-armed United States ground-launched cruise missiles based in the United Kingdom will be governed by agreed NATO procedures.

7. The United States retains the right in accordance with normal procedures to withdraw from their United Kingdom bases United States weapons deployed in the United Kingdom and to redeploy them elsewhere.

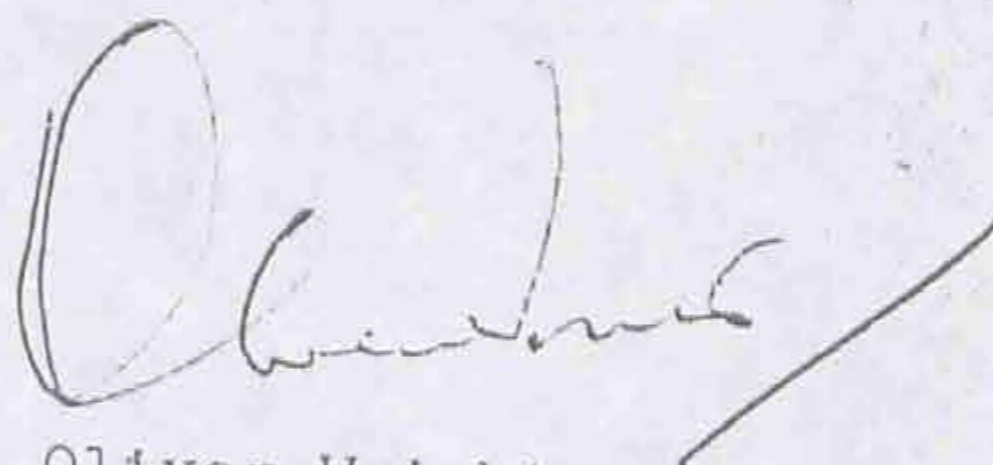
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8. NATO procedures notwithstanding, the foregoing understanding and arrangements will apply.

For the United Kingdom:



Oliver Wright
Her Britannic Majesty's
Ambassador

For the United States:



Lawrence S Eagleburger
Under Secretary of State
for Political Affairs

17 May 1983

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ANGLO-AMERICAN UNDERSTANDINGS ON NUCLEAR RELEASE
PROCEDURES: PRESIDENT-PRIME MINISTER CORRESPONDENCE

1. The most recent reaffirmation of the personal understandings between President and Prime Minister about consultation on the use of nuclear weapons was given in the exchange of letters on 27 February 1981 between President Reagan and Mrs Thatcher. The full texts of their letters, together with the Memorandum of Understanding to which they refer, are attached as appendices.
2. The original version of the Memorandum of Understanding was enclosed with a letter of 6 February 1961 from President Kennedy to Mr Macmillan summarising the various understandings in existence at that time. Since then it has been the practice for the Prime Minister of the day to seek reaffirmation of the Memorandum whenever the office of President or Prime Minister has changed hands. Thus, its reaffirmation was sought by Sir Alec Douglas-Home from President Johnson on 20 December 1963, and given by the President on 28 February 1964. It was sought again by Mr Wilson on 8 December 1964 and was given on the same day by President Johnson, and again in 1969 after President Nixon assumed office. It was sought by Mr Heath from President Nixon on 9 November 1970, and was given by the President on 14 December 1970. It was again sought by Mr Heath from President Nixon on 7 April 1971, and was given by the President on 4 May 1971. It was sought again by Mr Wilson on 16 December 1974 and given by President Ford on 9 January 1975. On 30 July 1976 Mr Callaghan sought a reaffirmation from President Ford which was given on 1 September 1976. Mr Callaghan exchanged letters of reaffirmation with President Carter on 4 March 1977. Mrs Thatcher did so on 25 June 1979.
3. The Memorandum was amended in 1965 by an exchange of letters between the Prime Minister and President Johnson to provide for joint decision prior to the release of United States nuclear depth bombs stored in the United Kingdom for use in emergency by United States and British maritime aircraft assigned to SACLANT.

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5. Further amendments to the Memorandum were made necessary following Mr Heath's agreement, in a letter of 7 April 1971 to President Nixon, to the use of Holy Loch by United States Poseidon submarines on the same basis as their Polaris sister-ships. In his letter of 4 May 1971 to Mr Heath, President Nixon confirmed that the Understandings in the Memorandum would apply with respect to Poseidon submarines "in the same manner and to the same extent as with respect to Polaris submarines".

6. A further amendment to the memorandum was made in the 1975 exchange of letters between President Ford and Mr Wilson. This amendment removed a possible ambiguity in earlier versions of the memorandum by specifying that all United States forces operating from land bases in the United Kingdom or in United Kingdom territorial waters are covered by the requirement for a joint decision by the Prime Minister and the President.

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7. A further amendment to the memorandum was made in the 1977 exchange of letters between President Carter and Mr Callaghan. This amendment reflected more accurately the present position regarding nuclear weapons for Royal Air Force aircraft. Finally at the time of the 1981 reaffirmation between Mr Reagan and Mrs Thatcher, it was agreed by means of side letters from Sir Robert Armstrong to Mr Macfarlane that the arrangements for joint decision would apply to the cruise missiles to be based in this country. This was ^{subsequently} reflected in the Wright-Eagleburger agreement, signed on 17 May 1983.

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DOCUMENT REMOVED AND DESTROYED

DOCUMENT REFERENCE	DOCUMENT REFERENCE	LOCATION of PM/PRESIDENT CORRESPONDENCE
Appendix 1 to Annex C	Prime Minister to US President dated 27 February 1981	PREM 19/607

Signed



Date 15 April 2013

Cabinet Office
London

DOCUMENT REMOVED AND DESTROYED

DOCUMENT REFERENCE	DOCUMENT REFERENCE	LOCATION of PM/PRESIDENT CORRESPONDENCE
Appendix 2 to Annex C	Prime Minister to US President dated 27 February 1981 attachment – Understandings with the British on the Use of British Bases and Nuclear Weapons	PREM 19/607

Signed



Date 15 April 2013

Cabinet Office
London

DOCUMENT REMOVED AND DESTROYED

DOCUMENT REFERENCE	DOCUMENT REFERENCE	LOCATION of PM/PRESIDENT CORRESPONDENCE
Appendix 3 to Annex C	US President to Prime Minister dated 27 February 1981	PREM 19/607

Signed



Date 15 April 2013

Cabinet Office
London

House of Commons
Hansard Vol. 42 No. 114
12th May 1983
Written Answers - Column 435

Cruise Missiles

Mr. Buck asked the Prime Minister whether she will make a further statement with respect to the arrangements for joint control of cruise missiles in the event of their deployment in the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister: The existing understandings between the United Kingdom and the United States governing the use by the United States of nuclear weapons and bases in this country have been jointly reviewed in the light of the planned deployment of cruise missiles. We are satisfied that they are effective. The arrangements will apply to United States cruise missiles based in the United Kingdom whether on or off bases. The effect of the understandings and the arrangements for implementing them is that no nuclear weapon would be fired or launched from British territory without the agreement of the British Prime Minister.

D

ANGLO-GERMAN CONSULTATION ARRANGEMENTS ABOUT NUCLEAR RELEASE

1. Anglo-German understandings about the deployment of British nuclear weapons in Germany were set out in a Memorandum of Understanding exchanged between Mr Heath and Chancellor Brandt on 17 March 1971. This Memorandum records the Federal German Government's agreement to the storage of British nuclear weapons at [redacted] and "at any other locations in the Federal Republic of Germany which may be agreed with the appropriate NATO military authorities and the appropriate German authorities".
2. The Memorandum states that the nuclear weapons in question "will be subject to the release procedures applicable to nuclear weapons provided for the defence of the Alliance. They will, in case of need, be employed only on the basis of the agreed strategy of the Alliance, in accordance with the applicable political guidelines and military plans of NATO, and under the command of the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), in accordance with the procedures laid down by him".
3. Under the terms of the Memorandum the Prime Minister is obliged to "consult directly with" (but not to secure the agreement of) the Federal German Chancellor prior to the release of British nuclear weapons stored in Germany. A hot-line between the Cabinet Office and the Federal Chancellery was established in 1971 for this purpose. The precise terms of the understandings as regards consultation prior to nuclear release are set out in paragraph 6 of the Memorandum as follows -
 - "6. In order to ensure that the Federal Government are given an opportunity to express their views prior to use of the British nuclear weapons stored in the Federal Republic of Germany, including where time and circumstances preclude consultation within NATO, the following procedure will be adopted -

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The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Federal Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany will consult directly with each other prior to the release of the British nuclear weapons stored in the Federal Republic of Germany. The technical facilities required for this purpose will be established.

These arrangements are without prejudice to the consultation procedures on the use of nuclear weapons agreed in NATO.

When deciding on the release of the British nuclear weapons stored in the Federal Republic of Germany the British Government will take into account the fact that in accordance with the decisions of the NATO Nuclear Planning Group of 18-19 April 1968, the views of the Federal Government as the government of a country most directly affected by the employment will be entitled to special weight."