

Handed to Gen Jewcraft
by Charles Powell
5⁰⁰ pm, 1/3/74

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~~TOP SECRET~~



BRITISH EMBASSY,
WASHINGTON, D. C.

2 January 1974

The Honorable
Richard Milhous Nixon
President of the United States of America
Washington DC

Dear Mr President,

I have been asked to pass the attached message from
the Prime Minister to you.

Yours sincerely,
Cromer

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Text of message from the Prime Minister to President Nixon:

"When we met in February last year I discussed with you the background to the decision with which HMG has been faced in connection with the improvement of our strategic nuclear forces so that they may be able to penetrate the area ballistic missile defences and radar cover which the Soviet Union is permitted by the ABM Treaty to deploy around Moscow.

"We have had to weigh the military, technical and financial factors relevant to two possible options for improvements. One option, upon which your people and ours have been working together for some time, is to effect a very considerable increase in the penetrative capability of our existing Polaris A3T missiles: we have ourselves developed a good deal of the necessary technology, but we have also relied upon you for very substantial and continuing support. The second option, which you have more recently and very generously offered to us, is that we should buy Poseidon C3 missiles, less the nuclear components of the Mark III warhead for which we should ourselves be responsible, and with a dispensing system adapted to remove a Mirv capability.

"I need not tell you of the difficulties through which the British economy is at present passing. We have been badly hit by the energy crisis and by the world-wide

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escalation of commodity prices which have greatly aggravated our balance of payments difficulties. Of course we shall come through it all, but only by tightening our belts. So we have had to conduct a drastic review of public expenditure: and you will have seen that on 17 December we announced measures of retrenchment designed to reduce demand by £1,200 million in the next financial year. Of this sum, we had to seek £178 million for the defence budget.

"I have been particularly anxious that we should not weaken our contribution to NATO's conventional deterrent, to which I know that you too attach great importance. I am entirely clear that an adequate conventional posture is an essential ingredient of deterrence: and I regard the provision of efficient conventional forces as an essential contribution to the partnership upon which the Atlantic Alliance must rest. We do not foresee any reductions in our conventional forces as a result of the reductions in defence expenditure that we have announced.

"We have therefore had to examine the nuclear options with particular attention both to costs and to the implications for our conventional forces. Against this background we have decided upon the option of improving our Polaris missiles. We greatly appreciated your generous offer of the Poseidon-based option and were conscious of its many advantages. But the Polaris-based option is substantially cheaper over the next few critical years for

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our public expenditure programme: and it is also less costly in foreign exchange. We realise that it lacks the potential capability of the Poseidon-based option to penetrate terminal defences, should the Russians decide to deploy these at some future date. But with our smaller and less flexible deterrent force it is not necessary for us, as it is for you, to be able to penetrate terminal defences that might be deployed around ICBM complexes: and if they were deployed around central Moscow within the limitations of the ABM Treaty we judge that a considerable portion of the greater Moscow area, not to mention the other great cities of the Western USSR, would be open to penetration by our improved Polaris missiles.

"I am sure that you will understand the reasoning behind our decision.

"I very much hope that you will feel able to confirm your agreement to the principle of our continuing collaboration so that our people and yours can proceed together to full development of the improved Polaris system.

"I am of course keeping knowledge of our decision to a very restricted circle here at this stage. It would be important, however, to be able to announce the decision when we publish our 1974 Defence White Paper, which is due to appear on 13 February, but has to be put into final form by 25 January. After the White Paper has been published we would of course plan to set experts to work without delay."