

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

~~TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE~~

PROMPT  
ACTION

January 9, 1974  
ACTIONS TAKEN  
FOR HAK MSG

MEMORANDUM FOR: SECRETARY KISSINGER  
FROM: William Hyland/Jan Lodal <sup>WPH</sup> <sub>P3 for</sub> ~~BEAS~~ fs,  
SUBJECT: UK Polaris Improvement Project

Attached (Tab I) is a package for the President on the British Polaris project. It recommends that he agree to the Prime Minister's request for our continued collaboration in the project.

For the President's approval is an answer to the Prime Minister, which he asked for by January 25, and a memorandum to the relevant agencies instructing them of the President's decision to proceed with the Polaris project.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That you forward the attached package <sup>at Tab I</sup> to the President.

2. Alternatively, that you approve the package for the President by: authorizing the transmittal to the Prime Minister of the message (Tab A to the President's memorandum); and sign the memorandum at Tab B.

Approve JK Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

DECLASSIFIED  
E.O. 12958, as amended, Sect 3.5  
NLN 01-03/9 per ltr. 3/16/2009  
By JMR NARA, Date 5/17/2010  
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~~TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE~~

[731/1/1/27]

## THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

~~TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE~~ACTION

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT

FROM: HENRY A. KISSINGER

SUBJECT: UK Decision on Polaris Improvement

Prime Minister Heath has sent you a message to inform you of the British Government's decision to continue with a program to improve their Polaris missile warheads rather than procure a modified Poseidon warhead (Tab C). He hopes that you will confirm your previous agreement in principle to collaborate on the Polaris improvement project and expresses his appreciation for your generous offer of the Poseidon system. Since the UK hopes to announce this decision in their annual Defense White Paper, subject to your agreement, the Prime Minister asks if you could indicate to him your decision by January 25, 1974.

The British decision is mainly motivated by economic considerations. The Prime Minister notes that domestic problems, including the energy crisis, have forced a retrenchment in spending, but that his government is determined that this retrenchment not affect the UK's NATO commitments. Thus, he has decided on the less costly alternative of improving the existing Polaris warhead for the UK nuclear submarine fleet, rather than undergo the expense of converting to a non-MIRV version of our Poseidon missile.

The Polaris improvement program involves adding to the three multiple reentry vehicles (MRV) a package of penetration aids that will ensure a British capability to overcome the existing Soviet ABM defenses. We have been cooperating with British experts on the initial experimental phase of this improvement package, but have not made a further commitment to the development, pending a British decision on whether to shift to the Poseidon.

If you agree to proceed with the Polaris project, we will probably have to provide space in our underground nuclear testing program for some UK tests of their modified warhead and for testing of the missile itself on our test ranges. This was envisaged from the outset, though no formal commitment was made. Your agreement to the Prime Minister's request

will permit the program to go forward. The British realize, however, that there is no guarantee that their modification of the Polaris warhead will succeed, since it is a new concept with which we are not thoroughly familiar.

There are no problems in agreeing to cooperate with the UK on this decision. From our standpoint, it is easier to accommodate the British decision on improving the Polaris than had the UK chosen to procure the Poseidon technology. Accordingly, I recommend that you confirm your agreement with the Prime Minister to collaborate in the project.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That you authorize transmittal of the attached message via the Cabinet Line to the Prime Minister, confirming your agreement to collaborate with the UK on the Polaris improvement project (Message at Tab A).

Approve \_\_\_\_\_ Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

2. That you authorize me to issue the memorandum at Tab B, instructing the relevant departments and agencies to proceed with the UK project and extend our cooperation.

Approve \_\_\_\_\_ Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

~~TOP SECRET~~

VIA CABINET LINE

TO: THE PRIME MINISTER, LONDON

FROM: THE PRESIDENT

I fully understand the reasoning that led you to choose the Polaris improvement project at this time. We will, of course, extend our cooperation, and I will instruct the appropriate US officials to collaborate with your government.

With regard to the technical matters involved, my advisors inform me there are certain innovative aspects of this project that may pose problems. We will fully support your effort to bring it to a successful conclusion. I believe it very important that you continue to maintain a modern, effective deterrent force.

I am pleased to hear that this decision will help enable you to maintain the UK's conventional capabilities and commitments to NATO. This is extremely important in present strategic circumstances and in light of the negotiations on force reductions in Central Europe.

I hope you will not hesitate to inform me of any problems that arise during the Polaris improvement project.

NLN 01 03/9

~~TOP SECRET~~

[731/1/1/30]

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

MEMORANDUM FOR

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
THE CHAIRMAN, ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION  
THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE

SUBJECT: Cooperation with the UK on Polaris Improvement

The President has agreed to a request from the Prime Minister to extend to the UK our full cooperation in completing the Polaris improvement program (Super Antelope). You should take the actions necessary to insure that this project can go forward. Periodic status reports should be provided to the President.

The previous restrictions (NSDM 124, July 29, 1971) limiting our participation to the project definition stage are hereby rescinded.

  
Henry A. Kissinger

cc: Director of Central Intelligence  
Director, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency  
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE



Dated Jan 2, 1974

Received 5:00P.M. Jan 3, 1974

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

/escalation



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

/our



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."



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THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

Action approved verbally by the  
President, January 17.

  
Brent Scowcroft

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