



PM/79/79

PRIME MINISTER

Comprehensive Test Ban

1. At the restricted meeting on 24 May we agreed to continue to participate in the CTB negotiations and try to find a solution to the national seismic station (NSS) problem which would avoid our having to pull out of the Separate Verification Agreement (SVA). The United States have sought 10 NSS on Soviet territory, and agreed to accept the same number. The Russians have agreed in principle provided that the UK, the third negotiating partner, accepts an equal number. We concluded that the most the UK should accept was 4 NSS (or possibly 5) and that this was dependent on the US paying for all except the one to which we were at present committed, or possibly a second if this were essential to reach agreement.

2. The Americans replied that it was impossible on political grounds for them to contribute to the cost of British NSS. But they had been pressing the Russians to be more flexible on numbers. (President Carter tackled Mr Brezhnev about this in Vienna, but without immediate response). However the Americans believed that the UK would also have to 'move more than half way', ie establish and pay for at least 6 NSS. In Tokyo, President Carter asked you whether the UK could accept 4 or 5. You said that this would still be too many.

3. The Russians have been told that we are reviewing our position. The options appear to be:

OPTION A: MORE THAN ONE NSS ON UK TERRITORY

The best chance of resolving the UK NSS problem and focussing the negotiations on other issues on which the UK would not be seen as obstructing progress, would be to offer more than one NSS. This has been consistently advocated by the Americans and by our CTB delegation. Three NSS is probably the lowest number that could be presented as a serious attempt by the UK to reach agreement.

/ OPTION B:



OPTION B: ONE NSS ON UK TERRITORY

To restate the last government's position that the UK could accept no more than one NSS would bring home to the Russians that we were serious in rejecting their proposal as completely without technical justification. However the Russians are most unlikely to capitulate, and it will be hard to get the Americans to support us.

OPTION C: UK WITHDRAWAL FROM THE SEPARATE VERIFICATION AGREEMENT

Although withdrawal from the 3-power SVA would underline our determination not to accept NSS, it has important disadvantages. Even if it eliminated our NSS problem, our influence on the course of the negotiations and on the future of the treaty after three years would be reduced. Mr Gromyko has said that the Soviet Union is not interested in this approach, and exchanges in Geneva suggest that the Russians will argue that, regardless of SVA membership, all three negotiating nuclear weapon states should have NSS since equal obligations carry an equal degree of intrusiveness.

4. It is unclear whether President Carter is still determined to conclude a CTB before the 1980 Presidential election. although he is deeply committed to the objective, he may have concluded that it would lead to a clash with his Chiefs of Staff and with Congress.

5. On the other hand, the Americans realise that non-aligned states regard a CTB as a fundamental part of the non-proliferation bargain and are showing growing impatience. Failure to show results by the time of the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in August/September 1980 may create a difficult situation; and the United Kingdom would not want to be seen to hold up the negotiations. For the past twenty years British governments have consistently argued that arms control agreements should provide the best possible verification. In other defence fields, eg Polaris replacement and TNF, we shall need maximum US goodwill.



6. I believe that the US Administration's prime consideration will be that our position should not jeopardise Soviet agreement to verification in the shape of 10 NSS on Soviet territory. Nevertheless it is far from certain that increasing our NSS contribution to, say, 3 stations, would satisfy the Russians. There is no convincing technical justification for any NSS on UK territory.

7. Accordingly I propose that, when the negotiations resume on 24 September, we should restate to the Russians the previous government's offer of one station in the UK (Option B). If that seems unlikely to resolve the problem, then to show our determination not to go beyond one station, we should tell the Russians that the alternative is our withdrawal from the SVA (Option C).

8. If you and our colleagues agree, I should like to inform the Americans of our decision early next week. But if you or other colleagues would prefer a discussion in Misc 7 first, I could wait until after our meeting on 19 September.

9. I am sending copies of this minute to the Defence Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Home Secretary and Sir John Hunt.

(CARRINGTON)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

11 September 1979

SEP 1979

