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SRWANO



c/c

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From the Private Secretary

26 November 1986

AEW DECISION TIMETABLE

8f || Thank you for your letter of 25 November about the timetable for the decision on Nimrod/AWACS. Subject to your Secretary of State's views, the Prime Minister's preference would be to have an initial meeting in a smaller group of Ministers at some point between 9 and 17 December. This would be followed by an OD discussion on 17 December and, if necessary, consideration by Cabinet on 18 December. Those who might participate in the first meeting, apart from the Defence Secretary, would be the Lord President, the Chancellor, the Foreign Secretary and the Chief Whip. I should be grateful if you could let me know if the Defence Secretary is content with this. It would also be helpful if Joan MacNaughton, to whom I am copying this letter, could let me know whether the Lord President has any different views. Subject to that I will try to fit in a meeting in the period in question.

I am also copying this letter to Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

(C. D. POWELL)

CA

Ian Andrews, Esq.,
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Prime Minister

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MO 26/7/3V

25th November 1986

Mr. Younger's
feeling is that
OD is likely to need
two bites at this
chance before 19 December.

AEW DECISION TIMETABLE

Agree to hold two
meetings of OD?
Or prefer an initial
meeting of a smaller central
group of Ministers?

CDP
25/11

The latter

I understand that John Howe spoke to you briefly on Friday about the AEW decision timetable.

As you may be aware, "best and final" offers were received from Boeing and GEC on 6th November. These are now being evaluated and the Defence Secretary hopes to be in a position to circulate a memorandum to the Prime Minister and to other members of OD on 9th December with a view to announcing the outcome of the competition, if possible, on Thursday 18th December. During this period, Mr Younger plans to offer to brief colleagues personally on the background to his recommendations. But he is concerned that if OD does not meet before the afternoon of 17th December as currently planned, there will be insufficient time to resolve any differences that remain. In that event, although it would be politically most undesirable and would increase the risk of a leak, there would be no alternative but to defer the announcement of the decision until the New Year.

Mr Younger believes therefore that it is highly desirable that the Committee should meet, if possible, before 17th December and he would welcome the Prime Minister's views. He is aware that the Lord President might not be able to be present at an earlier meeting on Monday 15th December but he is one of those colleagues to whom Mr Younger would hope to be able to offer a personal briefing during the previous week. He thinks it unlikely that a final decision would be taken before the 17th.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Joan MacNaughton in the Lord President's Office and to Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

(I C F ANDREWS)

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