

PRIME MINISTER

cc: Lord President
Chief Whip
Mr Wicks
Mr Powell
Prof Griffiths
Mr Whybrew

NIMROD/AWACS - PRESENTATION

I have discussed a presentational programme with the Ministry of Defence and the broad outline is as follows:

First, the immediate announcement.

Secretary of State for Defence:

- Statement in the House; followed by
- Televised press conference at MoD; followed by
- Radio and television interviews; possibly followed by
- SO20 Debate.

This takes care of immediate Government presentation. The MoD is producing a speaking note for Ministers and Mr Younger is still apparently intending to write to MPs setting out the Government's case on lines similar to the speaking note.

It is important that the Chief Whip should be able to promise a briefing note to those Backbenchers whom he gears up to respond immediately to requests from press, radio and television. The Government needs half a dozen heavyweight Backbench quotes in support of the Government's decision either in the House or outside - preferably to PA - immediately after the Secretary of State has completed his statement.

It will be especially important to get strong support on radio and television for the Government's decision in North London and Hertfordshire and Cheshire.

Follow-up

The media's follow-up interest will be in a confrontation between Government and GEC. MOD are anxious to avoid this, while at the same time keen for Cabinet Ministers to be seen to be supporting the collective decision.

You may care to mention at Cabinet your hope that Cabinet Ministers will make known their support for the decision, but refuse to take part in confrontation programmes. They should instruct their Chief Information Officers, in handling requests from the media, to decline all confrontation formats and insist on straightforward interviews.

We shall of course need to ensure that the Government's case is covered on the late night Thursday and Friday morning breakfast radio and television shows. I am asking Departments to keep No 10 posted with bids and acceptances for all radio and television.

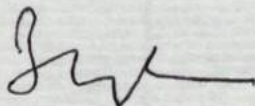
Crucial Issues

There are three crucial issues on which presentation will turn:

- the extent to which the Government is prepared to justify its decision at the expense of GEC; the MOD's mood after weekend interventions by Jim Prior is to go as far as security allows;
- the extent to which, again consistent with security, the Government is prepared to expose the technical evidence lying behind the decision;

- the Government's ability to say its decision is unanimous, and based on unanimous advice.

You may agree that the Government's best interests will be served by a forthright presentation of its technical case which does not exhibit too tender a concern for GEC. In essence what many people want to hear is the evidence which will enable them to back the Government. Going AWACS only makes sense if the evidence is against NIMROD, but potential supporters want confirmation. The Government's aim should be to let them have it, and to demonstrate that the Government and the experts who advise it are unanimous.



BERNARD INGHAM

16 December 1986