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QUESTION NO. 1

DAIL QUESTION addressed to the Taoiseach by
Deputy Proinsias De Rossa for answer
on Wednesday, 9th November, 1983.

QUESTION:

To ask the Taoiseach whether he sought an assurance at his recent meeting with the British Prime Minister that cruise missiles would not be based, on a permanent or temporary basis, in Northern Ireland.

REPLY:

As stated by the Minister for Foreign Affairs in the House on 27th January last in reply to questions, the Minister has received assurances from the British authorities that there are no plans for siting cruise missiles or any other missiles in Northern Ireland. Accordingly this matter did not arise in ^{the Taoiseach's} ~~my~~ discussions with the Prime Minister.

POSSIBLE SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

QUESTION

Can the Taoiseach remind the House of what the Minister for Foreign Affairs said in the reply to which he just referred?

SUGGESTED REPLY

The Minister said that he had received assurances from the British authorities that there were no plans for siting Cruise missiles or any other nuclear missiles in Northern Ireland.

QUESTION

Would it not have been useful for the Taoiseach to ascertain from the Prime Minister whether her Government's plans are unchanged in this regard and to seek to have the assurances which were given to the Minister repeated at the highest level?

SUGGESTED REPLY

I did not consider it necessary to raise the matter but I will, of course, keep the Deputy's views in mind.

QUESTION

Any question seeking details of what was discussed at the meeting or what views were expressed by the participants.

SUGGESTED REPLY

It is not the practice to give details of confidential discussions with other Heads of Government apart from what I have already said in relation to the matter raised in the question and what was contained in my Dail statement yesterday.

QUESTION

Any question about nuclear arms, arms control, the extent or meaning of the assurance which the Minister for Foreign Affairs received etc.

SUGGESTED REPLY

This is a separate question from the one which the Deputy tabled, which merely asked if I sought an assurance on the matter from the Prime Minister. The Deputy should put down a question to the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he wishes to get further information.

Note for Taoiseach's Information

1. Attached are copies of Questions 35 to 37 of 27 January last and the reply given by the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

2. In January, there were rumours that the British were going to site Cruise missiles in County Armagh. The Minister for Foreign Affairs was quoted in the press as saying that he would raise the matter with the British authorities. He did so on 24 January at his meeting with the then Foreign Secretary, Mr. Pym, which took place on the margins of an EEC Council of Ministers meeting. The following is an extract from the report of the meeting between Mr. Barry and Mr. Pym:-

The Minister referred to a rumour he had heard in Belfast to the effect that missiles were going to be sited in the North. Very energetically, Minister Pym described the idea as a "marvellous" rumour and totally untrue and at the Minister's request, said he could be quoted on this.

When Deputies Mac Giolla and O'Hanlon tabled the Dail Questions referred to above, the Department of Foreign Affairs negotiated an assurance with the British Embassy in more specific and useful terms than the statement made by Mr. Pym at his meeting with the Minister. The assurance they received was in the form of a letter at official level from the British Embassy, a copy of which is attached. When pressed by members of the public as to the level at which the British assurance was given, the Department of Foreign Affairs refused to disclose exact information but say that the assurance was given at "political" level. Accordingly, this line should be maintained in the event that it is necessary to answer supplementaries on the matter.

3. The Department of Foreign Affairs emphasise that the assurance which the British have given cannot be taken to cover all nuclear weapons. The letter from the British Embassy refers to "missiles" which does not include the nuclear bombs carried on military aircraft. Also, the term "siting" implies land-based missiles and so the assurance may not cover the missiles carried on submarines. The letter of 25 January from Mr. Orr replaced an earlier letter of 24 January which said, inter alia, that it was not the policy of the British Government to confirm or deny the whereabouts of sea or air based nuclear missiles. This letter was withdrawn following discussions between the British Embassy and the Department of Foreign Affairs and the British asked that the particular statement just referred to should not be quoted, though it is valid. However, the Department of Foreign Affairs advise that the assurance does cover the subject matter of Deputy De Rossa's Question.