

SCRUTINY

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AGREEMENTS REVEAL TERMS FOR US BASES

Classified agreements between Britain and the US, now published (apparently by mistake), show that Winston Churchill misled the House of Commons about the real costs of bringing the Americans to Britain — and reveal the agreed circumstances for US bases to be dismantled

SECRET agreements between Britain and the United States concerning land and facilities at US bases in Britain, have been opened to public scrutiny at the Public Record Office. They show that the cost of the bases to Britain was five times greater than the government admitted to the House of Commons at the time.

The documents just disclosed are the Anglo-American Cost-Sharing agreement, signed on 9 September 1953, and a standard 'General Conditions for Transfer' of RAF bases to the US, which was agreed early in 1954. Neither agreement makes any provision whatsoever for British control of US military activities, in peace or in war, save to note that 'peacetime flying by USAF aircraft' will be permitted.

Surprisingly, the Ministry of Defence believes that the agreements are still secret. Evidently unaware that copies are available at the Public Record Office, the Ministry's press department said on Tuesday that both the 1953 cost-sharing agreement, and an earlier 1950 'Ambassador's Agreement' were 'both still classified'. Section 51 of the Public Records Act, officials claimed, had allowed them not to release such 'documents dealing with matters of political or defence security'. The release of the document would have had to be negotiated with the US, they claimed.

MPs are to ask the Defence Ministry about the terms of the agreements, and why the Ministry should wish them kept secret. They

also want to know why one section of the Ministry has published copies of documents other officials think are still secret.

Soon after the agreements were first prepared, in February 1954, Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill was questioned by the late Tom Driberg MP about the cost of US bases. He told the House of Commons that Britain's financial contribution 'was limited to £22.5 million out of an estimated total expenditure of £125 million, spread over the years 1951 to 1955'. But the terms of the agreement show that Churchill's statement was at best confused — at worst a lie. The agreement says that Britain had to pay *both* amounts.

The agreement lists 'resources and facilities to be made available by Her

Majesty's Government' as £30 million works services up to 1952, and £95 million over the following three years — a total of £125 million. The agreement then notes separately that Britain had also to provide £22.5 million worth of capital works services, as well as free land and the free or reduced-cost services by Ministry of Works officials.

Even before Churchill spoke, a US congressional committee had revealed that Britain was providing cash and facilities worth a total of \$352 million (£124 million). At current prices, the real cost of these bases to Britain would be £1.2 billion.

The agreements also confirm that the British government is obliged to buy, and supply free of charge, any new land or facilities that US forces may require. Between 1972 and 1983, this provision alone cost Britain about £42 million.

Both the cost-sharing agreement (which was renewed in 1973) and the transfer document for each RAF base made over to the US do specify the terms on which US bases are to be closed down, and US forces evacuated from Britain. They say that the Americans can stay 'so long as, in the opinion of both [governments], the presence of such units in the United Kingdom is considered desirable in the interests of common defence'.

Thus, a future government of different political outlook is under no special binding agreement to retain US bases in Britain. But the agreements clearly imply that the day of dismantling US bases may be far into the future. The arrangement will 'terminate', according to the agreement, 'when, in the opinion of

either government, collective security has been achieved in accordance with the principles set forth in the Charter of the United Nations'.

Officials this week refused to give the British government's definition of these terms. Although the words in the UN Charter are not explicit, they appear to refer to a situation when the UN itself can guarantee the 'prevention and removal of threats to peace'.

A British minister and the American Ambassador agreed in 1953 that it would be undesirable to have a formal US-UK treaty on the bases which would necessitate disclosing some details to Parliament and the public. 'Her Majesty's Government see no need for the terms of the understanding to be embodied in a formal agreement', wrote George Ward, Air Ministry Under Secretary in Churchill's government.

Greenham spies: more bluster

Janes' Defence Weekly, the magazine which two weeks ago published a lurid account of alleged infiltration of the Greenham Common women's peace camp by specially trained Soviet Spetsnaz special forces, is now struggling to maintain its credibility. The article, which caused equal amusement inside the Pentagon, Kremlin, and British defence ministries, was the unsubstantiated work of a freewheeling Israeli journalist, Yossef Bodansky, who has himself come under suspicion of involvement in a spy ring against the United States.

After we reported (24 January) on Bodansky's murky background, Bruce Kent of CND asked *Janes'* to withdraw the charges about Greenham Common peace camp. *Janes'* editor Derek Wood refused, claiming that both the US State Department and the Pentagon 'categorically refute the allegations made in the *New Statesman* concerning Mr Bodansky'.

They don't. State Department spokesperson Deborah Cavin said this week that nothing official was ever said on the subject of the *NS* report by the State Department. She was certain there is nothing to substantiate *Janes'* claim. Pentagon Public Affairs spokesperson Lieut. Colonel Williams also said that they 'can't comment on it. We don't discuss security or intelligence matters'. So we asked *Janes'* to produce some written evidence of the 'categoric' rebuttal. They couldn't. Who in the Pentagon or State Department had refuted our report? *Janes'* spokesperson declined to answer. Meanwhile, Mr Wood — whose detailed response had previously been promised for Tuesday — was 'away'.



Mrs T's role model (in Washington 1952): either confused or lying

Camera Press