

SCRUTINY

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CHEMICAL WEAPONS PLAN PUSHED AHEAD

Within the next six weeks, Mrs Thatcher and members of a secret British government committee will meet to consider their support for controversial US plans for a new NATO 'chemical deterrent'. Approval for the American plans is now being quietly pushed through NATO

IF THE US is successful in its current behind-the-scenes manoeuvring, NATO's highest body, the North Atlantic Council, will agree plans at the end of May to acquire US 'binary' chemical weapons. A favourable NATO decision (from the US point of view) will also constitute de facto approval for the new weapons to be brought to Britain in a crisis.

Funds for the binary chemical weapons have previously been blocked by strong opposition in the US Congress. Nevertheless, Reagan may soon get his way — but not before October this year, and then only if NATO has agreed first.

A Congressional Bill specifies a complicated formula for NATO approval. First, the President has to certify that the US has submitted to NATO a 'force goal [for] binary munitions'. This has happened — the force goal is understood to have been approved by the NATO Military Committee in mid-Feb.

The force goal must finally be approved by the North Atlantic Council. The Council will meet to consider this in Brussels on 22 May. If NATO approval is forthcoming, President Reagan has next to certify that the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR) has 'a plan' for the weapons to be 'deployed under appropriate contingency plans' in Europe. These plans are already written, SACEUR General Bernard Rogers said in February.

The British government remains evasive about its involvement in the chemical arms plan. The Foreign Office claims that, despite the imminence of the NATO meeting,

'no approach has been made to the British government either by NATO or the United States on a bilateral basis to ask the British government for agreement to the emergency deployment of US chemical weapons'. Asked whether SACEUR's contingency plans now refer to Britain as a planned storage site for the emergency nerve gas deployment, the Defence Ministry say that they will 'not answer hypothetical questions'.

In fact, the 'hypothetical' question is already answered. At the last of a series of two early reviews of British chemical weapons policy, Mrs Thatcher's secret committee considered the development of a British-only chemical stockpile (see NS 11 January 1985). Despite her great enthusiasm for this course of action, no decision was taken at the time. Ministers favoured an alternative option of allowing the US to deploy binary chemical munitions in Britain — even in peacetime. ●

File 'disappears'

THE DISAPPEARANCE of confidential papers dealing with unauthorised British Army and secret service activities from the House of Commons office of a Conservative MP is to be investigated by the police. Teddy Taylor, the right-wing Tory MP for Southend, fears that his office in the Commons' Norman Shaw Building was entered last month and the 'fat file' of papers removed.

Entry to the building is controlled by a police checkpoint and his office is locked, Taylor said this week, adding that '[the loss] does concern me'. He reported the loss to the police on Tuesday, after his research assistants had carried out several extensive searches.

The missing papers concern the affairs of a constituent, former Army intelligence officer Captain Fred Holroyd, who has been asking the Ministry of Defence to compensate him for his sudden removal from a sensitive post in Northern Ireland on grounds, which were later



Ouston's 'secure vehicle compound': who's parking there?

Car park for Britain's bomb

BEHIND barbed tape and weldmesh fencing at Albemarle Barracks, Ouston, near Newcastle, and surmounted by an array of floodlights on high masts, is a flat tract of concrete and a guard tower — Britain's most costly, highest security car park. The likely purpose of the million-pound so-called 'secure vehicle compound', just completed this month, has now become evident. It will be an overnight stopping ground for RAF 'special weapons' convoys, which carry nuclear weapons around the country.

The NS pointed out last month

that the MoD's refusal to identify the purpose of vehicles which might visit Ouston (NS 7 March) did nothing to assuage rising local concern that the high security precautions were the first step in the development of a third British cruise missile base. The fencing and other security equipment at Ouston resembles the initial stages of development of the second British cruise missile base, Molesworth.

Soon after that, Ministry of Defence officials became more specific and told a local paper, the *Newcastle Journal*, that Ouston was a 'car park for convoys of lorries carrying nuclear material'. This is confirmed by the layout of the 'park', which provides for up to four of the special nuclear weapons transporters to be positioned facing a circular, hardened guard post, fitted with thick bulletproof glass. The site is surrounded by a high double fence and entered through remotely controlled gates.

The RAF nuclear convoy makes monthly trips to Scotland, transporting warheads for Polaris missiles between the nuclear weapons factory at Burghfield, near Reading, and the Royal Navy Armaments Depot at Coulport on the Clyde. Hitherto, it has usually stopped overnight at an RAF depot at Longtown, just north of Carlisle.

But this function may now have been taken over by Ouston. Photographs taken at Ouston two weeks ago (not illustrated) appear to show part of the convoy — an RAF safety tender and a single nuclear weapons transporter — inside the compound. The compound was empty this weekend, but was being patrolled by military police.

The Defence Ministry, however, now refuses to confirm its earlier admission about the purpose of the base. 'No one should comment on the composition of the [nuclear weapons] convoy, or its purpose', a representative told the NS. ●

acknowledged to be spurious, of a 'mental problem'. Two years ago, Holroyd publicly revealed his knowledge of extensive police and army 'dirty tricks' activities in Northern Ireland (NS 4 May 1984).

Last week's 'disappearance' is the second time that papers connected with the Holroyd case have gone astray. A folder of original papers sent to the Prime Minister's office in January 1985 was never returned, and photocopies substituted. MoD officials now admit that it was 'possible' that copies were 'inadvertently substituted' for the papers sent to them from No 10.

M15 continues to be deeply concerned about the Holroyd case and that of former Army official Colin Wallace, with whom Holroyd is connected. The disappearance of the Holroyd papers was, Taylor told the NS this week, 'very distressing in view of Mr Holroyd's very understandable suspicions'. 'I don't know whether they've simply been lost, or removed, or whether I've mislaid them'. But it was 'the first time it has happened to me in my parliamentary career of 21 years'. ●