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1. DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION

a. TYPE Oral History	b. TITLE HENDERSON, Arthur - 06181963
c. PAGE COUNT 2	d. SUBJECT AREA British Nuclear Program

2. AUTHOR/SPEAKER

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d. OFFICE	e. AGENCY	

3. PRESENTATION/PUBLICATION DATA (Date, Place, Event)

June 18, 1963 Oral History Interview	REVIEWED BY DOD	13
DEFENSE OFFICE OF PREPUBLICATION AND OFFICE OF SECURITY REVIEW		
NO CLASSIFIED INFORMATION FOUND		
Jun 21, 2017		

4. POINT OF CONTACT

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5. PRIOR COORDINATION

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6. REMARKS

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Interview with NO CLASSIFIED INFORMATION FOUND

The Rt. Hon. Arthur Henderson Jun 21, 2017

by Alfred Goldberg

June 18, 1963

Q. When did the RAF start thinking in terms of a nuclear deterrent force?

A. All I can tell you is when the RAF began to think of the V-bombers.

The requirements for the V-bombers were first stated in 1946. But the word nuclear wasn't used. The RAF was looking for jet-age bombers; it wanted an efficient and modern bomber force. When I left office in 1951 we did not have any atomic bombs.

Q. When did the RAF start stating requirements for the development and production of nuclear weapons?

A. The RAF never stated any requirements through me. I think that requirements for atomic warheads might have been stated in connection with guided missiles that were under development.

Q. What role did the RAF have in the decision to develop the bomb?

A. I know nothing about that.

Q. When was the decision made to develop the bomb?

A. I cannot say. I do not recollect that I ever saw the minutes of the Defence Sub-Committee meeting at which it was decided.

Q. Were major decisions on bomb-carrying vehicles delayed pending the development of the bomb?

A. No. Especially after the Korean War began we gave great emphasis to speeding up the Canberra, the V-bombers, and the jet fighters. Before Korea, the emphasis was on limiting expenditures on defence. Following World War II the financial and economic situation was such as to

limit our expenditures on armaments. The Berlin Blockade and Korea led to an almost complete transformation of policy. The emphasis switched to a buildup of forces.

Q. Were the propulsion units the chief factor in the development of the V-bombers?

A. I wouldn't like to say that there was any holdup. Once the requirements had been agreed on, it was clear that it would be three to four years before there would be prototypes of the new V-bombers.

Q. Did the explosion of an atomic device by the Russians in 1949 affect RAF strategic and technical thinking?

A. You'd have to ask the Air Staff about that. I have no doubt it did. The Air Staff were only too well aware of the military consequences of such an event, but we have to remember that our chief ally was already in possession of the atomic bomb. My concept was to build up the most powerful air force possible within our financial limitations. We had plans F, G, and H, you may remember, each one calling for a larger force than the preceding one. Sir John Slessor was pressing very hard for more modern jet fighters.

Q. Was the ten-year rule on a future war a formally agreed rule for guidance of the services?

A. It was an agreement among the Chiefs of Staff with the approval of the Minister of Defence. It was already in existence as a guide in 1945-46.

Q. Did the Labour Government make a decision on production of atomic weapons before it went out of office?

A. As far as I know, no.