

CONFIDENTIAL

cc Queen: Audience: P

Defence

MR BUTLER

Mr. Fletcher

Pl. note x1 1203

14.10.

RAF Transport Aircraft

The Prime Minister discussed the attached minute (s/s MOD to PM of 14/10) with the Secretary of State for Defence this afternoon.

Mrs Thatcher expressed the view that the proposal to buy two 146 aircraft for use initially by the RAF Communications Squadron, and to swap them later for the executive model for use by senior members of the Royal Family and the Government was sensible.

Mr Nott said that he hoped the fact that £15m would be spent on these two aircraft this year would not be turned against him by critics with the argument that the money should be spent on items of more military relevance. The Prime Minister said that she doubted if that argument would be mounted. There was a clear need for better short haul aircraft for the Royal Family.

It was agreed that there would need to be a carefully concerted public line about the purchase.

Passages deleted and closed, 40 years,
under FOI Exemption.

Wayland

27 August 2013

A.J.C.

14 October 1982

CONFIDENTIAL



1) Dr. Bytner to see
 2) Prime Minister
 Agree to have a private word
 with the defence secretary?

Yes
 Mr.

A.S.C. 8/10

MO 35/5

PRIME MINISTERRAF TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT

We have discussed on a number of occasions the problem of providing suitable aircraft for use by senior members of the Royal Family and by yourself and other senior Ministers. The burden of short haul trips, particularly in Europe, with a team of officials, is increasing - and time is an expensive commodity.

2. As you will recall, in searching for a possible replacement for the Andover, we have been trying to find an aircraft of British manufacture which has accumulated several years of safe operation and which meets a number of other criteria in terms of range, take-off from short runways, compliance with noise regulations at civil airports and so on. There are three possible contenders which meet some of these requirements: the BAe 111, the HS 125 and the BAe 146. The 111 does not meet noise requirements at civil airports and is now such old technology that it is hardly suited to a "prestige" task. The HS 125 is, of course, already in service and used for a number of "VIP" journeys but it lacks the capacity for longer hauls with larger numbers of people. This leaves the 146 as the only serious contender. The present versions are rather large and lack range but a future executive version is projected with a configuration and fuel capacity much closer to our requirements. What the 146 lacks is "proving time" of safe operation of the sort that we require before we would allow the aircraft to be used by the Royal Family.

3. I understand that there are two 146 (100 series) aircraft currently available for purchase for around £15M for the two. We might buy these two aircraft as additional assets for the



RAF communications squadron, prove them in RAF operation, and then at a later date swop them for the executive model which could then be made available, if required, for use by senior members of the Royal Family. The purchase would not be for the Queen's flight as such - as I have doubts whether we should continue the Queen's flight in the medium term - but we would explain that the 146 has been bought by us for potential use by The Queen in due course. I need not add how very greatly such an RAF purchase would add to the international sales prospects for the BAe146.

4. This is a highly sensitive subject for all sorts of reasons and, if you thought it was an option worth pursuing, we should need of course to take soundings of the Royal Family. I am also concerned that my willingness to contemplate buying these aircraft should not be misrepresented in the context of our current discussions on defence expenditure. Before making any formal proposition, I should, therefore, welcome a private word with you.

Ministry of Defence
8th October 1982



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