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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
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MO 6/17/15/1J

Prime Minister

19K December 1990

Dear Charles

AD

will supply if reqd.

DEPLOYMENT OF TORNADO AIRCRAFT

In his minute of 20th November about reinforcement options (recommending the deployment of 1 Armoured Division to the Gulf), the Defence Secretary said that he would report further on the possibility of deploying up 24 Tornado GR1 aircraft to add to the offensive capability of our forces. These aircraft were already being modified to allow them to deploy rapidly if necessary, but, at the time of the Defence Secretary's minute, it was not possible to reach a firm decision.

We have had a request from the US Commander, General Schwarzkopf, for additional all weather attack aircraft, particularly with an anti-airfield capability. The Prime Minister may recall from Monday's briefing how important it would be to put Iraqi airfields out of action quickly in any air campaign. The Tornado GR1, equipped with the JP 233 airfield denial weapon, is ideally suited for this role. We have now established that the Saudis can make space for 12 aircraft to be based at Dhahran. The additional weapons stocks and stores required can be prepositioned by making use of the shipping which is transporting the ground reinforcements to the Gulf. The Defence Secretary has concluded that 12 aircraft should be deployed to Dhahran after Christmas. (The extra costs of this increase are not significant). The other 12 aircraft being modified would remain in Europe and offer a means of rapid reinforcement or replacements for losses during hostilities.

Although a modest increment to Allied airforces, the Prime Minister might like to mention this enhancement during his talks with President Bush. The Saudi authorities are already aware of it because of the discussion on airfields.

I am sending copies of this minute to the Private Secretaries to other members of OPD(G) and to Sonia Phippard (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely

Janet Binstead
(S WEBB)

Private Secretary *AD*

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