



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

2 December 1982

New John, *mt*

Further to Brian Fall's letter of 26 November, I am now able to give you Mr Pym's considered views on the proposed sale of six Hunter aircraft and ground equipment to the Zimbabwe Air Force on commercial terms.

Mr Pym sympathises with Mr Nott's concern about the possibility of domestic criticism, given public interest in the torture of Air Force personnel. However, he believes we should also take into account other important commercial and political considerations.

In view of the conversation Mr Nott had with Mr Mugabe in Harare about the Hunter aircraft, a failure to proceed with the sale would come as a shock to the Zimbabweans. It would inevitably put future military sales (£50m in prospect) in serious jeopardy. Moreover, because the Zimbabwe Government would probably take the view that we were going back on an undertaking, civil public contracts (£200m won since independence and a further £200m now being pursued with a good chance of success) would also be placed at risk.

We should moreover have to face up to the real possibility that the Zimbabwe Government would start looking elsewhere, possibly to the Soviet Union or its surrogates, for help. It is relevant in this context that at a lunch with a number of MPs on 17 November, Mr Ian Smith made a point of emphasising to Mr Onslow that Britain should retain its position as main source of supply for the Air Force.

It is also relevant that there is at the moment something of a power struggle taking place between Mr Usheqokunze, Minister for Home Affairs (a radical) and Mr Mhangagwa, Minister for State Security (more moderate). Mr Chidzero, the pro-Western Minister for Finance and Economic Development, has in the last few days told both us and the Americans that he regards the next few weeks as a possible watershed in government policy, and he has asked that friendly governments should exercise restraint

/and



and avoid any injudicious pressure. A negative decision on the Hunters could have a particularly damaging effect at this delicate stage.

Our High Commission in Harare advise that an adverse Zimbabwean reaction of the kind I have described would become very likely if we delayed our response much longer, for example into the New Year. We could certainly not hope to procrastinate without penalty until after the trial of the Air Force personnel (which will now probably take place during the second session of the High Court starting in July next year).

(later than earlier estimate)

Now more likely in February.
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In these circumstances, Mr Pym considers that the right decision would be to agree to the sale of the six aircraft without further delay. Other points concerning our relations with Zimbabwe can safely be left until Ministers have considered the broader issues. In confirming to the Zimbabwe Government a decision to sell the Hunters, we would of course take the opportunity to press home our concern that the trial of the Air Force personnel be brought forward.

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram (MOD), Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office) and to John Rhodes (Department of Trade). I also enclose a short background note.

Yours very truly
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BACKGROUND

Hunter Aircraft and Ground Support Equipment
for the Zimbabwe Air Force (AFZ)

On 25 July almost all the AFZ's operational fighter aircraft were destroyed or badly damaged by sabotage. The Zimbabwe Government asked us to supply six replacement Hunter aircraft (five fighters and one trainer and Hunter ground support equipment). Following Mr Nott's agreement in principle to supply all aircraft and equipment, the Defence Sales Organisation began negotiating details with the AFZ. We do not anticipate any difficulty in obtaining US agreement to a sale of Hunters (the aircraft were originally partially funded under the Mutual Development Aid Programme).

When Mr Nott met Mr Mugabe he confirmed that we were discussing with the Zimbabwe Air Force and Ministry of Defence how we might be able to help over the provision of six Hunter aircraft to replace those destroyed. He said that this might be done either by sale or lease, but the Zimbabweans said they preferred sale.

Despite the current shortage of foreign exchange there are good prospects for other defence sales. The AFZ's intention of purchasing more Hawk aircraft (£17m) has been publicly stated and the Army remain interested in Scorpion (£5m) and Landrovers (£6-8m) and tactical radios (£19m).

Zimbabwe

UK relations



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