

(included in brief of orders)



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
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MO 26/11/9

22nd April 1983

Dear John,

We understand from British Aerospace that Herr Madelung of Messerschmitt-Bolkow-Blohm will be in the German Industrial Mission scheduled to meet the Prime Minister on 26th April and that he might well raise the question of HMG's attitude to the Agile Combat Aircraft.

The Prime Minister will wish to have a line to take and a brief on this question and these are attached.

Yours ever  
Nick Evans

(N H R EVANS)

A J Coles Esq

DEFENSIVE BRIEFAGILE COMBAT AIRCRAFT (ACA)Line to take (if HMG view is sought)

- We recognise industrial importance of a new military programme.
- Premature to make a decision on a particular combat aircraft at this stage. Need to assess real collaborative and commercial prospects and ability to satisfy national military needs at affordable costs.
- We are committed to an Experimental Aircraft Programme (EAP) and other demonstrator work, which will give a sounder technological base for future decisions.
- We would welcome other governments' participation in the EAP.

Background

The Agile Combat Aircraft is perceived by British Aerospace in collaboration with its Tornado partners, Messerschmitt-Bölkow-Blohm and Aeritalia as a new profitable military aircraft for the world market. It is aimed at a 1990 in-service date. The immediate plan is to build two prototype aircraft, one at BAe Warton and one in Germany.

HMG has no commitment to the ACA as such. There are complex issues to be resolved before decisions can be made on a future combat aircraft for the Royal Air Force. Recognising this and the need to sustain a UK industrial option, it was agreed in August 1982 that MOD should undertake a research aircraft programme which will provide very practical significant and technological assistance to any industrial initiative, whilst, at the same time, MOD gains better understanding of the many operational, international and



political issues involved, including the essential market and collaboration prospects and the central questions of costs and affordability.

It has been agreed between BAe and the MOD that the ACA prototype to be built at Warton will provide a suitable vehicle on which to demonstrate the integration of specific advanced technologies of interest to MOD. That aircraft will thus serve both as an ACA prototype and as the Experimental Aircraft and costs are being shared appropriately. The companies Messerschmitt-Bölkow-Blohm (of which Professor Madelung is Joint Deputy Chairman) and Aeritalia are contributing commercially to ACA costs but are unwilling to commit themselves beyond the end of 1983 without financial support from their Governments. There is strong French pressure to wean MBB away from their UK connection and ensnare them with Dassault, who are being supported by the French Government with a similar experimental combat aircraft programme (ACX).

Discussions have begun with the German, French and Italian Air Staffs to explore the possibility of harmonising future combat aircraft requirements sufficiently to allow a truly European collaborative project.