

File (571)

Defence Department
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Private Secretary
Mr Wright
Mr Gillmore
Mr Fenn, News Dept
Mr Young, WFO

London SW1A 2AH

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20 MAY 1982	
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J M Stewart Esq
AUS (D Staff)
Ministry of Defence
London S W 1

25 May, 1982

Dear Murray,

FALKLANDS : ANGLO-FRENCH COOPERATION

We had a word last night about the Sunday Mail article of 23 May in which Derek Hill dwelt at length on the help France had given us in providing Harrier pilots with air combat practice against French aircraft of types held by the Argentines. I enclose a copy of the article for ease of reference: it purports to be based on a "high level Whitehall source" over the weekend. As you know, the French Political Director, Andreani, complained to Mr Pym personally about this in the margins of the EC meeting in Brussels yesterday.

2. Although one can only deplore leaks of this kind about Anglo-French defence cooperation, the impact of the Sunday Mail article is made somewhat less by the fact that the French weekly L'Express has already, as you reminded me, run a story a week or two ago about Harrier pilots being provided with simulated air combat against French Mirages over the North Sea. In addition I note from Paris telegram number 541 of 24 May (repeated to the MOD) that Marcel Dassault apparently claimed on French radio that Britain had asked for the loan of super Etendards and Mirages to study their strengths and weaknesses; and that Monsieur Hernu, commenting on this, is quoted as saying that he had no knowledge of any British requests "concerning the possible loan of French planes to Britain". So far as leaks are concerned, therefore, the honours would appear to be evenly divided. Nevertheless Mr Pym's office were disturbed that the Foreign Secretary should have been approached personally by the French on the Sunday Mail article, and you may wish to consider whether this further apparent leak needs to be pursued.

3. We discussed the line to take with the press about all this. I agree with you that the first line of defence should if possible be "no comment". If pressed hard, the formula would be that "it is normal for joint exercises and training to take place between British and French forces". I will make sure that the FCO News Department are aware of this MOD line, which I assume has also been cleared with the French.

John
P J Weston