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PRIME MINISTER

LOW FLYING IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

COP 17/2

In advance of next week's Anglo-German Summit, I thought it would be useful to let you have my thoughts on one of the Federal Republic's major current concerns, namely low flying by military aircraft over Germany for training purposes.

2. Allied military exercises in the Federal Republic have become increasingly unpopular in recent years, particularly on environmental grounds. Even before the Ramstein airshow disaster last August, Manfred Woerner (as German Defence Minister) had pressed for some action to assuage German public opinion on the low flying issue. I warned Woerner that the RAF had already reduced low flying training over the FRG and that I saw very little scope for any further significant reductions. However, I did agree to participate in an Allied study into ways of reducing the impact of such training on the population. This remains our position, and work is under way under the auspices of a group led by State Secretary Wimmer (Michael Neubert is our representative).

3. Meanwhile, however, the accidents at Ramstein and Remscheid (where a USAF aircraft crashed into the town centre) have heightened public concern about the safety of low flying training. Ironically, neither accident was a direct result of such activity but the issue was sensationalised by the media and exploited fully by critics of current Allied training policy. The issue of

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national sovereignty was raised, but to some extent, defused by the German Government; unfortunately, their handling of the low flying issue itself had been much less adept. There is a regrettable degree of pressure from parliamentarians (including CDU/CSU members) for legislation which would effectively ban low flying (as we understand it) over German soil. Although Rupert Scholz has continued to stress the need for such training, he has allowed public expectations to be raised that a significant cut is possible and that he will secure Allied agreement to this. Scholz has, of course, arrived at a difficult time, and he has not been well supported by his colleagues. In particular, Genscher has been positively unhelpful on the low flying issue, while Chancellor Kohl has either stood aside or encouraged the view that the Germans are somehow unique in facing this problems and that reductions must be made.

4. The minimum low flying training requirement is now being studied urgently both by SACEUR and by the "Sending States" (UK, US, Canada, Belgium, the Netherlands and France). Some concessions may be possible; if properly presented, they might go some way towards mollifying German public opinion. But if our aircrew are to remain operationally capable, then there is little scope for further substantial reductions in low flying training over the FRG. If NATO is to maintain the current commitment to forward defence, then this must be under-pinned by a credible front line, including our strike/attack aircraft.

5. It is vital to leave the Chancellor in no doubt about the seriousness of our concerns in this area, particularly as he may suggest that the FRG's problems in this area are different from those of the UK. In fact, the UK bears at least as much fast jet low flying training as the FRG and, in general, such training is lower, faster and for longer hours. RAF Germany already



carries out some 30% of its low flying over the UK; the USAF also carries out more such training in the UK than over the FRG. Public and Parliamentary concern in this country, though growing, remains manageable. To some extent, this reflects the way in which such training is spread relatively evenly throughout the country, unlike in the FRG, where it is more concentrated. But, more significantly, we adopt a robust political posture in this area, supported by a strong public relations effort. One key element in our approach has been that low flying in the UK has reached a "plateau" and that we currently expect no significant increase in the foreseeable future. Were we to modify this position, particularly to accommodate more flying by RAF Germany squadrons, we would undoubtedly face political difficulties. Accordingly, the Chancellor should, I suggest, be told firmly that the FRG will not be able to offload any further low flying onto the UK.

Clearly there is no easy answer to the German problem, which is, in part, one of their own making. The only way forward which is fully compatible with current Alliance strategy is for the FRG government to adopt a more robust public posture on the essential requirement for low flying training. It should be possible to devise a package of measures which can be presented as evidence of the Allies' goodwill and determination to minimise the environmental impact of this activity, though this may not in itself suffice to win over public opinion. In addition it will be necessary for the Chancellor and his government to present a united front and to resist pressure for further concessions.

Turning to your joint press conference, it is likely that you will be faced with a number of questions on the low flying issue. Given current German public expectations, it would be inadvisable to be as robust in public as will be possible with Chancellor Kohl

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in private. You will, of course, be able to point to the fact that the UK bears at least as much of the low flying burden as the FRG. It will be helpful to point to the work being carried out by State Secretary Wimmer and his Alliance counterparts with a view to reducing the impact of low flying on the civilian population. But you will, I think, wish to avoid suggesting that a significant reduction in the amount of low flying is in prospect. Ultimately, a substantial level of training remains necessary to maintain the capability to fly low - and safely - and thus help maintain the Alliance policy of deterrence.

I am sending a copy of this minute to the Foreign Secretary, the Home Secretary, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and to Sir Robin Butler.

G.Y.

Ministry of Defence

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