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From the Private Secretary

11 April 1989

LOW FLYING IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

The Prime Minister has considered the Defence Secretary's minute of 10 April about the continuing difficulties with the German Government over low flying in the Federal Republic of Germany. She is very concerned by the trend of the discussion with the German authorities. She thinks that we must stand absolutely firm on the principle that we shall not have the training of our air crews compromised. She would rather see us withdraw a squadron or more of aircraft currently stationed in RAF Germany - as envisaged in paragraph 13 of the minute - than agree to this. She regards a reduction in the amount of training per sortie allowed at low level to 20 minutes as the minimum we should accept.

RF / The Defence Secretary will wish to take these views into account when deciding his tactics for the next meeting with his German colleague. They seem to me to be generally compatible with paragraph 17 of his minute, although they would require the deletion of the words "at present" from paragraph 17(b). We shall need advice in due course on whether the Prime Minister should raise the matter with Chancellor Kohl when they meet on 30 April.

I am sending copies of this letter to Stephen Wall (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

C. D. POWELL

Brian Hawtin, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence.



Agree. i.e.
WE MUST NOT

MO 3/20E GO BELOW

MO 14/3 20 mins. I WILL NOT

HAVE THE TRAINING OF OUR
CREWS COMPROMISED. AM
PRIME MINISTER

Quite PREPARED to CONSIDER
WITHDRAWING A SQUADRON.

LOW FLYING IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

We must not let the arguments of others
about disarmament get in the way of our
own disarmament.

1. I last minuted you on this subject on 16th February in advance of the Anglo-German Summit. Since then, there have been a number of developments of which you should be aware. I should in addition be grateful to know that you are content with the proposed way ahead prior to my further discussions with my US and German colleagues in the margins of the Nuclear Planning Group meeting in Brussels next week.

2. Over the last year, the military staffs of the Allied nations concerned have been studying a possible package of measures designed to be helpful to the German Government in dealing with political opposition to military low flying, and which has now engaged the personal attention of the Chancellor. As I said in my earlier minute, Rupert Scholz has encouraged public expectations of a significant reduction in low flying training - and in this he has been abetted, albeit tacitly, by Genscher and Kohl.

3. The results of these further studies are now to hand, and I have had the opportunity to consider them. I have also had a long and frank exchange with Rupert Scholz in the margins of the WEU meeting in London last week, at which I told him that I would reflect on the points that he made to me, and be in touch again.

The Results of the Study

4. The joint studies have concentrated on measures which could alleviate the impact of military low flying training on the civilian

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Prime Minister

This minute letters on the
brink of being weak.
We have already offered to
reduce from 50 minutes or
250 feet to 20 minutes. Surely
we should not contemplate
going further.

The Germans must be made to
face their
responsibilities
or they
will
have us
on the
run
everywhere.

Agree
no
further
concessions?

CBD
10/4



population, whilst not reducing the level of training below that which is required to maintain credible combat-ready forces in Germany. The work culminated in a meeting of Chiefs of Air Staff of the Allied nations involved (the UK, US, Canada, France, Belgium, the Dutch and the FRG) on 20th March in Bonn. It seemed just possible prior to the meeting that agreement might be reached on a package of measures which, although in some part cosmetic, would be satisfactory from the German point of view and acceptable to Allies. At the meeting itself the stumbling block proved to be German insistence (on instructions from Scholz) on substantial reductions in the amount of low level training carried out at 250 feet. 250 feet is the level generally agreed throughout the Alliance as a reasonable compromise between on the one hand the operational need for combat missions to be flown at considerably lower altitudes in order to avoid threats to the aircraft, and on the other hand the nuisance to those on the ground in highly populated countries. The Allies, including most importantly the US, did not break ranks in resisting what was proposed (although the Canadians stepped slightly out of line at the last minute with an unhelpful concession). The considered opinion of the Air Staff is that reductions in the proportion of general low flying spent at 250 feet to the sorts of level proposed by the Germans would be militarily unacceptable. The matter was therefore referred to Ministers for consideration.

My Discussions with Scholz

5. During our bilateral discussion Scholz set out at some length and in familiar terms the political arguments in favour of a reduction in low flying training. He expressed disappointment at the outcome of the meeting of Chiefs of Air Staff and painted a stark picture of what he sees as his near total isolation on this issue. He saw the way forward comprising a package of measures which combined some re-distribution of low flying and a limit of 10 minutes



on each sortie flown at 250 feet, as opposed to the 20-25 minutes per sortie which the Allies had said they required, and to the present permitted maximum of 50 minutes per sortie. By contrast there is at present no limit in the United Kingdom on the length of sorties flown at 250 feet.

6. I explained to Scholz that I would be discussing the results of the recent meeting in detail with my advisers, and considering the matter with Ministerial colleagues here. I said that it was the Government's wish and policy to try to do everything possible to meet the political requirements of the Federal Government and to reduce the impact of low flying to a level with which they could live. But I could not agree to any reductions to a level at which low flying training in FRG ceased to be safe or to provide essential training.

7. I shall be meeting Scholz again at the NPG on 19th/20th April. He has said that he wishes to discuss the matter further with me before he raises it with the new US Secretary of Defense, Dick Cheney. I have agreed to the bilateral, but have also made sure that I talk to Cheney first. It seems likely that Scholz is engaged upon an attempt to drive wedges between the other Allies; this must be resisted.

Questions for Discussion and Decision

8. The main question which needs to be addressed is whether we should accede to the demand made by the Germans that there should be a substantial reduction in the amount of low flying training undertaken by the Royal Air Force and other sending states' Air Forces in the FRG. The most recent characterisation of this demand has been that training at low level should be limited to an average of 10 minutes per sortie.

Richmond.



9. Our military advisers tell me that, whilst the amount of low level training in the FRG has been reduced steadily over the years, a reduction of this magnitude is unacceptable in operational terms. It is relevant that already, in response to German pressures, over 40% of RAF Germany's essential training is now undertaken elsewhere, mostly in the UK. In the discussions between Chiefs of Air Staff, Peter Harding made clear that we would be prepared to contemplate limiting the present level of activity at 250 feet to 20 minutes per sortie and no less. This was also the firm position of the US. The Germans are comparing this with the current wholly artificial limit on the Luftwaffe of about 90 seconds at 250 feet per sortie. To go below 20 minutes would take us below the acceptable level if our aircrews are to train even remotely realistically for their role in war.

10. The professional judgement of our military staffs is that effective low flying training cannot be conducted without a significant proportion being at 250 feet or below, and that reductions in low flying in Germany of the kind proposed by the Germans could not be fully compensated by additional low flying for these units in the United Kingdom. They have grave reservations about the operational effectiveness of the Luftwaffe under their current training regime. This judgement is shared by the US, and agreed privately by the Luftwaffe. Moreover we have told Parliament that we do not expect any significant increase in the present level of low flying training in the UK. A sudden increase would not go unremarked and would raise a number of awkward questions. If associated in the public perception with a reduction in low flying training in Germany because of political pressures there, the problems would be even more severe. At present, the amounts of such training by fast jets in the UK and the FRG are broadly comparable. Neither Parliament nor public opinion would understand why the UK had to take a greater share of the training burden which is after all in



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the interests of the common defence. We already export some of our own training to places such as Goose Bay in Canada, and there is pressure in the House (particularly from the Opposition) for the amount exported to be increased. Even if some such further exporting were possible and practicable, it would not be possible to absorb the balance of such training activity in the UK without a marked, and noticeable increase in training here.

12. If we were forced to contemplate such an increase in RAF flying in the UK it would, of course, be appropriate to consider asking the FRG to reduce the amount of flying training that they conduct in the UK, in particular at the Tri-national Tornado Training Establishment (TTTE) at RAF Cottesmore, although this would in turn require the re-negotiation of the relevant Memorandum of Understanding and would run against the grain of our efforts to promote collaborative procurement of equipment and co-operation in training.

We may have to

13. A further way of reducing the amount of low flying training in the FRG, but in consequence increasing that in the UK, would be to withdraw a squadron or more of the aircraft currently stationed in RAF Germany. This would be a very major step indeed, and one which at present I am not prepared to contemplate seriously. If parallel action were taken by the US, ie the withdrawal of aircraft to the continental US (which might for a variety of options prove attractive to Congressional opinion in Washington), the impact on forward defence would be very considerable indeed.

Discussion

14. I believe that the political pressures in Germany for a reduction in low flying training are such that the Allies must be seen to be taking German concerns very seriously and doing their best to assist the Federal Government. If we cannot reach a sensible



agreement with the Germans, we risk having less than sensible constraints imposed on us. We also need critically to guard against the risk of US withdrawals of their aircraft from Europe.

Notwithstanding the importance of the issue to the maintenance of our essential operational capabilities, we cannot lose sight of the

importance to the Alliance as a whole of the continuation of a Government in Bonn which understands and accepts NATO's defence policies and plans. We must in particular be careful to ensure that

the debate on low flying does not sour the climate for German thinking on SNF modernisation. I am however far from sure that a

major concession on low flying would materially assist the Germans in reaching a positive decision on SNF modernisation. There is also

the point that there can be no guarantee that the Germans would not subsequently press for further reductions in low flying, although

Scholz has said to me in discussion that there would be no question of "salami tactics" being used against us at a later stage.

15. I am having further work carried out urgently on the matter as a whole, particularly as regards the precise implications of a further reduction (to, say, 15 minutes) in the amount of training per sortie allowed at low level, to see what would be the implications if the Germans were to insist on such measures. This work will of course have to include a further look at the question of what steps can be taken - which might be saleable politically - to see what can be done to assist the Germans in managing the environmental aspects of the problem. The experience here was that when the revised UK Low Flying System was introduced in late 1978, to distribute the burden of training more equitably throughout the country, the new system was generally accepted. The German system, which is more limited in its geographical coverage, concentrates the activity, and hence the level of complaint. My Department is looking further at this, but I am bound to say that it is unlikely that such longer-term proposals and studies will assist in the management of the immediate problem.



16. Action is also being set in hand with posts in Bonn, Washington, Ottawa and NATO prior to the NPG on 19th/20th April to seek firm views on the likely approach by other sending states to the German position. I have mentioned already that I intend to see Cheney (who, it must be said, is a total newcomer to the issue) before I next see Scholz.

The Way Forward

17. I intend to make clear again to Scholz at the NPG meeting that I am continuing to study the concerns which he raised with me when we met at the WEU, and that I will also need to discuss the matter further with Ministerial colleagues here. I will also take the opportunity sound out Cheney and other colleagues. I intend, subject to your views, to be guided by the following principles:

Yes a. That we should keep in step with the other 'sending states' and most importantly the United States.

? b. That, beyond the measures which have already been put on the table by officials, I cannot at present offer any substantial reduction in the amount of RAF low flying in Germany.

c. That, in the event that Scholz does not moderate his demands, I should seek to play the issue long to avoid any mutual interference with the debate on SNF modernisation.

d. That I should continue to examine the scope for any further measures that might assist the FRG whilst preserving adequate training standards, with the aim of avoiding the risk of more severe constraints being imposed on us.



18. Prior to that meeting I should be grateful for an indication that you and Geoffrey Howe are content with this approach. I would if at all possible welcome an opportunity to discuss the issues with you.

19. I am sending a copy of this minute to Sir Geoffrey Howe and to Sir Robin Butler.

C.Y.

Ministry of Defence

10th April 1989

Germany: PM's meeting with Kohl



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