



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

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26 April 1989

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Dear Charles,

LOW FLYING IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

Your letter of 11th April asked for advice on whether the Prime Minister should raise the subject of military low flying in the Federal Republic of Germany at her meeting with Chancellor Kohl on 30th April.

The background of our wider defence relations with the FRG has of course changed since the Defence Secretary's minute of 10th April. Stoltenberg has replaced Scholz; extension of the period of conscription has been postponed; and there are, of course, the continuing and significant developments on SNF which form the main item for the meeting with Chancellor Kohl. Although the Defence Secretary met Scholz in the margins of the Nuclear Planning Group meeting in Brussels last week, the subject of low flying was not discussed; it remains to be seen what line Stoltenberg will take on this issue.

Against this new background, the Defence Secretary still considers that it would be worthwhile for the Prime Minister to raise the subject with the Chancellor. The appointment of Stoltenberg may provide a fleeting opportunity for us to influence the FRG's approach on this matter; we understand that he is reviewing the position, and anything that the Prime Minister can do to urge upon Chancellor Kohl the need for a constructive outcome which preserves Alliance security interests would be most helpful.

The key points to put across are:

- UK recognises German political difficulties particularly in the emotional tide generated by the tragic accidents at Ramstein and Remscheid last year. But, of course, those accidents had nothing to do with low flying.
- Absolutely essential, therefore, to maintain adequate level of training for forces stationed in Germany. Credible combat-ready forces essential for deterrence and in the absence of significant progress in conventional arms control will remain so.

Charles Powell Esq
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- Current level of training is far from military perfection. In war our pilots would need to fly at 100 feet and lower and considerably faster than in peace.
- Training at 250 feet is generally accepted in NATO as a reasonable compromise between adequate operational training and the need to minimise disturbance.
- Professional military advice is that effective low level flying training is not possible without a significant proportion being at 250 feet and below.
- Royal Air Force Germany already exports more than 40% of its low flying training to the UK and elsewhere.
- Current 250 feet flying by RAF units in Germany already close to irreducible minimum. Time average of 20 minutes per sortie at 250 feet and 85 sorties per pilot per year regarded as minimum for adequate in-theatre training.
- Importance attached to flying at 250 feet is reflected in structure of UK Low Flying System where maximum area is open to flying at that level; fast jet burden in UK is as great as that in FRG and includes some flying at night. This burden is absorbed not least because we present the *raison d'être* positively.
- In an effort to help, comprehensive package of measures already put forward at Chief of Air Staff level.
- Should concentrate, and UK will assist wherever possible, on making the best possible presentation of these sensible measures.
- We do not think that sufficient weight has been given by German Government to the advantage that the package offers in terms of public presentation. Hope, therefore, that Stoltenberg will take a much more positive look at the advantages it offers and at how it can best be sold to public opinion.
- Joint aim should be to play matters long until current difficult period passes.
- Essential to handle matters in close consultation with other Allies. Await German thoughts on the matter.

The key element is to try and persuade the FRG Government not to rush into arbitrary reductions in flying at this stage. At present, the amount of training conducted both by ourselves and by



the USAF and Canadian Air Forces (although not by the German Air Force) can be put forward to our domestic audiences in NATO as a bare but adequate minimum. Once this point is publicly passed, it would be increasingly difficult to resist further restrictions on the amount of low flying conducted both in the FRG and elsewhere which would take us well below what is deemed militarily essential.

Kohl has already made it clear that he sees the need to reduce low flying training in Germany. The UK response has been to agree the need for a reduction of the impact of low flying training on the population, but to resist vigorously measures which would seriously impair the Alliance's fighting capabilities and which would be deemed militarily unacceptable.

The Prime Minister may wish to be aware that the Defence Secretary's discussion with Mr Cheney on this subject in the margins of last week's Nuclear Planning Group went well. Although Mr Cheney had not previously focused on the subject, the discussion brought out difficulties the US could face if it became apparent that the Germans were not prepared to do what was necessary to maintain the operational readiness of forces stationed in Europe. Mr Cheney agreed with Mr Younger's view that it was best to play the issue long if at all possible and that the UK and US should keep absolutely in step on our minimum requirements in this area.

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

Yours sincerely
Bra Hawtin

(B R HAWTIN)
Private Secretary

GERMANY : Relations Party

