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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

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191k July 1990

Dear Charles,

LOW FLYING IN GERMANY

The Prime Minister should be aware of further problems over low flying in Germany.

You may recall that last year a package of measures on low flying was agreed with Dr Stoltenberg after protracted negotiation (Brian Hawtin's letter of 1st September 1989) allowing flying down to 250 ft in seven areas. This package formed the basis of a paper which Dr Stoltenberg presented to the Bundestag. For a time it was successful in lowering the temperature of the low flying debate in the Federal Republic. Developments in Eastern Europe have, however, now led to renewed pressures on Dr Stoltenberg, from parliamentary colleagues in the CDU/CSU. Dr Stoltenberg has written to the Defence Secretary and other NATO colleagues proposing a ban on all low flying training in the FRG under 600 feet in the light of developments in Europe and the increased warning time now available.

The pressure on Stoltenberg (who is, as you know, usually very sound) is from within the coalition and can only be expected to increase in the run up to the German elections. Indeed a group of 30 CDU/CSU members are advocating 1000 ft. We understand that the latest initiative has the support of the Chancellor. Indications are that most of the other nations involved will fall into line. The Canadians may take an opposing view. The Defence Secretary has tried to make common cause with the US. Although there was some concern in the US Air Force, their operational methods do not rely so much on low flying. Mr Cheney will broadly accept Dr Stoltenberg's proposals.

The introduction of more restrictive regulations in the FRG will have operational implications for us. It could also lead to increased public pressure on military low flying in the United Kingdom where we are due to respond to the recent House of Commons Defence Committee report on low flying.

Charles Powell Esq
No 10 Downing Street

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Dr Stoltenberg has said that he would like to report to the Bundestag by the end of August but indications are that he is likely to impose a 600 ft limit on flying in FRG by the German Air Force earlier than that irrespective of reactions of NATO colleagues, if only to try to forestall the move to introduce a 1000 ft limit. In a frosty interim reply, the Defence Secretary has made it clear that he is disappointed that the issue is being reopened so soon after last year's settlement and that he will need time to consider the full implications. Even with very little support from NATO colleagues, the Defence Secretary expects to reply shortly on the lines attached. This would cut RAF low flying time by 80%. We doubt whether Dr Stoltenberg will be moved even by this but, by politely disagreeing with the Germans, the Defence Secretary hopes to make any domestic pressure for a 600 ft limit more resistable.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Tim Sutton (Lord President's Office) and Stephen Wall (FCO).

Wm. S. Webb
John Lees

(S WEBB)
Private Secretary

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I said in my letter of 28th June 1990 that I would write to you again as soon as possible about your further proposals for low flying in the Federal Republic of Germany.

I well understand that many in Germany, as elsewhere, feel that the lessening of tension should allow a lessening of the low flying burden. Much of this, as a result of forward stationing, is by airforces of your NATO Allies. We discussed last year the particular problems associated with the current 250ft low flying system in the FRG. Although the amount of low flying training in the FRG is similar to that undertaken in the UK, the structure of the FRG system covering, as it does, only a small proportion of the Federal Republic tends of course to concentrate the burden of this training. I am however, worried by your proposal to forego all training at 250ft. Despite the relaxation in tension, I consider that the operational need to be able to carry out such flying in conflict needs to be sustained as part of NATO's current defensive posture. The RAF's Tornado and Harrier aircraft, in particular, are dedicated to the low-level role and military advice to me is that some training at 250ft remains essential in order to retain

Dr Gerhard Stoltenberg
Minister of Defence
Federal Republic of Germany



expertise for the longer term. This cannot be satisfied by the relatively small percentage of lower level training available outside Europe.

This said, I recognise that in peacetime a balance must be struck between the need to maintain effective and adequately trained air forces and the acceptability of this training to the wider public. The judgement of what is acceptable in this respect in the Federal Republic must be for you and your colleagues. I therefore accept that, in principle, Allied flying in Germany should normally take place above 600ft. But to sustain our posture of war-prevention I believe that RAF pilots need on average to be able to undertake about 5 minutes flying down to 250ft a week in Western Germany and I would hope that it would be possible to reflect this in your new structure for low flying. This would reduce the total amount of lower level flying required. Further reductions would of course flow from any subsequent decrease in force levels taken, together with the changes offered by other colleagues with different operational needs (such as the United States) there would be a major reduction in Allied low flying overall. We could also readily avoid such flying on Fridays as well as at weekends. My staff are ready to discuss the details of such proposals with yours.

I should be grateful if you would keep in the closest touch about the way in which you propose to take matters forward so that we can deal together with Parliamentary and public opinion.