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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

TELEPHONE 01-218 9000

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11 September 1990

My dear Gerhard,

Thank you for your letters of 27th and 29th August about military low flying training in the Federal Republic of Germany.

While I appreciate the current pressures on you and your colleagues to respond to the changing environment in Central Europe, I must say that I am very disappointed that you have not been able to take into account the concerns expressed in my letter to you of 20th July. These were, of course, in relation to your earlier proposal to limit flying below 600 ft. The 1000 ft restriction which you have now said you will introduce causes me even greater concern. With our agreement last year the UK sought to do as far as possible in meeting your Government's efforts to reduce the impact of low flying training on the public in the FRG and I had been under the impression that the results of our agreement had at least met with a favourable reaction from the public.

As you recognised in your latest letter and in your presentation to the Bundestag Defence Committee last year, low flying remains an essential tactic for an effective modern air force. The Royal Air Force would naturally make the very best use of any time available to improve combat readiness before any

Dr Gerhard Stoltenberg
Minister of Defence
Federal Republic of Germany

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outbreak of hostilities but our view is that such training must be able to build on a firm base of low flying expertise established in peacetime. Military advice to me is that training at above 600 ft and even more so at 1000 ft cannot meet this latter requirement. If training at levels below 1000 ft is not available in the Federal Republic for forces stationed there, the level of effectiveness of all our forces can only be maintained, even at a minimum level, by seeking compensatory training elsewhere. The UK Low Flying System is, as you know, already heavily used by RAF aircraft based in Germany and by United States aircraft based in the UK, as well as by RAF aircraft based here, and I see no scope for increasing the existing total amount of low flying here. Other locations abroad have environmental and cost considerations of their own and your decision again to alter the arrangements in the Federal Republic will not make it easier for NATO Air Forces to obtain the necessary training elsewhere. As an example, I am sure you will be familiar with the difficulties that led to the decision not to pursue proposals for a NATO Tactical Fighter Centre earlier this year.

This new proposal comes at a particularly difficult time of tension in the Gulf when emphasis must be placed on the need of air crews, particularly those flying Tornados, to be currently fully trained in low flying and therefore comes at a most unwelcome time for the Royal Air Force, with aircraft committed in the Gulf. The level of RAF low flying training activity in the UK has been substantially increased in recent weeks because of the need to provide combat ready crews in the Gulf trained down to 100 ft and crews have been drawn from both UK and RAF Germany Tornado squadrons for this purpose. It may be necessary to supplement or to rotate crews currently on station with further Tornado crews from the UK and from Germany, where as you know the bulk of the RAF's Tornado GR1 squadrons are stationed. The implications of the new regulations on 17th September for the RAF in the FRG would mean

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an inevitable disruption of training for these crews. I would therefore hope that you and your colleagues could agree to defer the introduction of this change for the RAF's Tornado force in FRG at least until the current crisis has been resolved. If you agree, our Air Force Staffs could discuss the details.

In the longer term a 1000 ft limit for military flying gives us particular cause for concern on safety grounds. First, a minimum height of 1000 ft is likely to increase considerably the number of occasions when military aircraft will have to abort lower level flights because of a decreasing cloud base and even if you were to legislate to raise the minimum height of general aviation aircraft the density of air traffic then requiring to use the height band above 1000 ft can be expected to increase substantially the risks of accidents. Your staffs will, no doubt, have considered these points and I hope that any new regulations will be designed to ameliorate the risks involved. I would also hope that consideration has been given to exemptions from the 1000 ft limit for the use of weapons ranges and for Forward Air Control training and aspects of tactical air reconnaissance; and also for selected NATO exercises. I should be glad to hear from you at an early date about the results of such considerations.

I have also been considering the implications for low flying training in the United Kingdom of the proposed changes in the FRG. The German Air Force conducts a limited amount of low flying training in the UK, for example, during exercises and squadron exchanges. In the light of the new restrictions in FRG, however, I do not believe that it would be acceptable to UK public opinion for training to be carried out in the UK by aircraft based in other countries under conditions more favourable than those which would apply in their own country. I believe therefore that it will be

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necessary to introduce appropriate height restrictions for training carried out here by German aircrew.

So far as future RAF training is concerned, our requirements need to be reviewed in the light of the work currently under way on the Options for Change exercise in the UK. You are being consulted on this as a matter of mutual concern. The reduced availability of training in the FRG with its implications for our ability to maintain the required level of operational capability, and the additional costs of flying aircraft based in Germany to the UK and elsewhere for training will be factors that I shall need to take into account. I shall have to include in my considerations the possibility of changes in training arrangements in the UK at TTTE and also in the presently proposed deployment plans. These however can only be addressed when the future shape of our forces is clearer and we shall keep closely in touch with you on any developments.

As I have indicated above, your decision to introduce this far reaching change at very short notice and without consultation is a very great disappointment. You will know that this unilateral decision may well undermine completely all low flying in our countries. I and my colleagues, in considering the way ahead must seek to maintain the training which we believe is essential to our forces and take due account of UK domestic factors. At the same time I can assure you that we shall not lose sight of the need to preserve the collective security of the Alliance on which we both rely and trust that you will be able to respond in the same spirit to the points I have raised.

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lan

Tom King

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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

Telephone 071-21 82111/3

MO 3/20S

11th September 1990

Prime Minister

The Germans are
just giving up on
defence. But I think
the Defence Secretary's response
is the best we can do.
A bit of public
criticism of the German performance
would be deserved.

LOW FLYING IN GERMANY

We discussed briefly my Secretary of State's latest exchange of letters with Dr Stoltenberg on low flying.

The background is that the Secretary of State has received further letters from Dr Stoltenberg (copies attached) in which he states that the FRG has decided to introduce a minimum flight level of 1000 feet above ground level with effect from 17th September 1990. This new rule is being put into effect by the German Air Force from that date and as a result of private discussions between Mr Bush and Herr Kohl on 25th August, the US has also agreed to this new limitation. We were not consulted by the US about this nor by the FRG in advance of Dr Stoltenberg's letter of 29th August, nor has any substantive reaction been received from Dr Stoltenberg to the proposals put forward by the Defence Secretary in July (copy attached to my letter of 19th July) in reply to the German proposal at that time to raise the lower limit to 600 feet.

The Defence Secretary has discussed the situation with Mr Cheney (who was not consulted by Mr Bush before he gave Mr Kohl his agreement) and who felt, in response to a question by Mr King, that any moves such as acceleration of the closure of bases in FRG would have little or no impact on the Germans. A major restructuring of US bases in Europe - mainly in FRG - reducing US troops by about 40,000 had not been greeted with any alarm by the Germans, either in regard to scale or timing. However in the light of UK commitments to the forces in the Gulf, and the deployment of Tornados (the GR1 squadron together with half of the crews came from Germany), we would wish to agree with Dr Stoltenberg that we should continue to fly down to 250 feet in Germany until the crisis is over. We also believe that it would be unacceptable to the public to allow German aircrews to continue to exercise in the UK Low Flying System at a level below 1000 feet although in the case

Charles Powell Esq
10 Downing Street

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of the integrated Tri-national Tornado Training Establishment, it is impractical to give this effect. As a result of the German decision, the operational capability of RAF Germany will not be able to be fully sustained by training in Germany and we are giving further thought to the proposals for Options for Change in respect of the number of aircraft deployed in FRG.

A further consequence of the German decision will be that RAF Germany will have to carry out more of their low level training in the UK although we shall have to ensure that the total volume of low flying in this country does not increase. We anticipate achieving this by reducing by about 20% the amount of low level flying by the USAF in the UK. The USAF understand the reasons for this and the Defence Secretary made the position clear to Mr Cheney in his recent conversation, having warned him earlier of the possibility that this would have to happen if the rules changed in the FRG. The additional training by RAF Germany in this country will also lead to substantial additional costs to the RAF in travelling to and from Germany, and we are looking at ways of offsetting these, as mentioned in the draft letter from the Defence Secretary.

I also attach a copy of the reply which the Defence Secretary has sent to Dr Stoltenberg. I am copying this letter to Tim Sutton (Lord President's Office) and Richard Gozney (Foreign Office).

Yours sincerely
Sam Webb

(S WEBB)
Private Secretary

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A. GERHARD STOLTENBERG

Bundesminister der Verteidigung

5300 Bonn 1, August 27, 1990
Postfach 1328
Tel.: (0228) 12-9100

Dear Colleague

following the intensive consultations during the past months concerning changes to low-level flying in the Federal Republic of Germany a decision is now required.

The US are now prepared to accept a minimum flight altitude of 1000 feet (AGL). This rule is being introduced for the German Air Force.

I would now ask you to likewise adopt this concept, which shall become effective 17. September 1990, for low level flying by your air force within the Federal Republic.

I would appreciate an early reply. !

Yours sincerely,

Stoltenberg

COURTESY TRANSLATION

DR. GERHARD STOLTENBERG
Bundesminister der Verteidigung
Federal Minister of Defence

5300 BONN 1, Aug. 29th, 1990
Postfach 1328,
Tel.: (0228)12-9100

His Excellency
The Secretary of State for Defence
for the United Kingdom and Northern
Ireland
The Rt Hon Thomas Jeremy King TD MP
Ministry of Defence
Main Building
Whitehall

London SW1 2HB
Great Britain

Dear Colleague,

As I have already explained to you in my short letter dated August 27th, 1990, I have decided without delay to put up the minimal height for low-level flying of jet combat aircraft to 300 meters. After the intensive consultations during the past months the administration of the U.S.A. has decided to approve of a respective new regulation from its point of view. The US Air Force will follow this regulation.

This decision was the result of the negotiations and analyses of the past months. The numerous talks and written comments of the colleagues were of help for me with it. I have given serious considerations to your reservations.

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Of special importance for our revised position the agreements had been which Chancellor Helmut Kohl had reached with President Gorbachev about the quick withdrawal of the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union from the territory of the present GDR on July 16th this year.

There cannot be any doubt that low level flying has always been an indispensable prerequisite for the efficient use of air forces. From this follows the necessity that the crews have to be capable of it if war demands such operations from them. In view of the different political situation in Central Europe, however, I consider it justified to order restrictions for low-level flying in peacetime to take some of the load off the people if it can be expected that combat readiness can be achieved by additional training just before the outbreak of combat activities.

According to your assessment, this will only be possible if your crews will in future have the opportunity to train for low-level flying in heights of 250 feet in the Federal Republic of Germany, at least for limited periods.

In appreciating all factors, I believe nevertheless that there was no alternative to my decision. I regret that I had been forced by the circumstances to take and to publicise this decision within such a short time, and that I had been left without time to inform you about my intentions in detail. For this I request your understanding and ask for your good, constructive cooperation in future with regard towards our common responsibility for the security of our Alliance.

The new regulation is to become effective from Sept. 17th. I ask you to follow it with the elements of the Royal Air Force which train in the Federal Republic of Germany.

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I realise the necessity to carry out consultations about details of the realisation between our air force staffs before this measure becomes effective. I have asked the Chief of the Air Staff to get in touch with his colleagues for this matter.

Yours sincerely,

(signed Gerhard Stoltenberg)

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