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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

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8th November 1990

Dear Charles

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Simon Webb wrote to you on 11th September 1990 in the wake of the German decision to introduce a minimum level of 1000 feet for low flying training in Germany. The Prime Minister will wish to be aware of further developments.

As you will know, the Defence Secretary wrote in forceful terms to Dr Stoltenberg, pressing in particular the need for an exemption from the new regulations for training associated with our commitment in the Gulf. In the margins of the Western European Union in Paris on 19th September Dr Stoltenberg was persuaded to agree to a very limited two week extension for training one Tornado squadron for the Gulf but no substantive response was given to our other concerns. The Defence Secretary wrote again to Dr Stoltenberg on 2nd October seeking a further extension for Gulf related training (copy attached) but this has now been formally turned down by Dr Stoltenberg on the instructions, we understand, of Chancellor Kohl.

It has been clear throughout our negotiations with Germany on this issue that the driving force behind the German restrictions was political and the proposals made very little military sense. This is underlined by Bonn telegram 1351 which makes it clear that, in our Ambassador's view, there is very little prospect of any substantial change to the German position, even after the forthcoming elections. We need therefore to consider the way ahead both for low flying in the UK and for training by RAF Germany aircrew.

As Simon indicated in his previous letter, a 1000 feet limit has been imposed on any German Air Force aircraft based outside the United Kingdom which carry out low flying training here. We have also been giving further thought to the position of German aircrews based at the Tri-national Tornado Training Establishment based at Royal Air Force Cottesmore in the UK. With German Air Force pilots

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on operational squadrons unable to train down to 250 feet in Germany, the Defence Secretary sees no reason why German Air Force student aircrew in the UK should need to train down to 250 feet to the detriment of the UK public. Against this background, we intend to take steps to limit German students at TTTE to 1000 feet, adapting the common syllabus appropriately but protecting the Italian position. While this would require some segregation of the training, it would still allow TTTE to continue for the present.

Further work is still being carried out on the longer term Royal Air Force low flying requirement against the background of our Options for Change conclusions. However, to give headroom in the UK Low Flying System in the short term, the Defence Secretary will now be formally limiting US low flying activity in the UK to some 80% of its previous annual level although not, of course, limiting the total amount of flying carried out by the USAF. While this step will obviously be unwelcome to the US, it would be sensible to introduce this change now as a direct response to the German decision, rather than later; it will not be unexpected and, particularly when seen against the position of US units in Germany, it should not, we believe, pose undue problems for them. The action to limit flying by German aircrew at TTTE should also assist in providing some extra flexibility for training RAF pilots.

There remains the task of clarifying German intentions in the longer term with regard to air to ground weapon training ranges (which are under pressure from the Bundestag Defence Committee) and to occasional NATO exercises at more realistic heights. We would propose to bring these issues forward for discussion in the NATO framework after the German elections, in close co-operation with the US and other allies affected. I attach a copy of the letter which the Defence Secretary proposes to send Dr Stoltenberg.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Tim Sutton and Richard Gozney.

Yours sincerely,

Miss J R Binstead

(MISS J R BINSTead)
Private Secretary

DRAFT LETTER FROM SECRETARY OF STATE TO DR STOLTENBERG

Thank you for your letter of 18th October explaining the difficulties that a further Royal Air Force exemption from the new low flying regulations would cause you.

This is obviously a disappointing outcome which will impose a further strain on RAF training at a critical time but I recognise the problems you have faced in dealing with public and parliamentary pressures in Germany. Similar pressures also exist in the United Kingdom where I am now faced with accommodating additional Royal Air Force low flying training from Germany.

Against the background of our assurances to the United Kingdom public and Parliament that we will not allow the total amount of low flying training here to rise, I have little alternative but to seek to offset this increase in the new year by reducing to some extent the burden of allied low flying in the United Kingdom by United States Air Force units based here, and by German Air Force aircrew at the Trinational Tornado Training Establishment. As I have already said, I would also find it difficult to defend a situation in which German aircrew in the United Kingdom could undertake training below 1000 feet and RAF aircrew in Germany could not. Please accept my assurance, however, that this does not imply any lessening in our commitment to multi-national co-operation and we will seek, in implementing any changes, to mitigate the effect as far as possible.

Germany: Relb AG

