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Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

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11 June 1991

London SW1A 2AH

Dear Stephen,

file

Prime Minister

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Hess and the KGB

You asked for further background on the claims by Mr Tsarev reported in "The Times" on 10 June and on the "Today" programme on 11 June that the KGB have papers which show that Hess was lured to Britain by British Intelligence, and that he provided information on the planned German invasion of Russia in 1942 (Operation Barbarossa) which we failed to pass on to the Russians.

Hess's flight to Scotland in 1941 and his subsequent incarceration in Spandau prison in Berlin until his death in 1987 have for years been the stuff of conspiracy theories. There are two clusters. The first concentrates on the circumstances of Hess's flight, alleging that there was a group of Nazi sympathisers in the British establishment who would have been prepared to do business with him. Tsarev's allegation is a variant upon this.

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We have not seen the papers the KGB claim to have but cannot believe that they provide genuine evidence in support of Tsarev's claims. Hess told us nothing about Barbarossa - though we warned the Russians about it on the basis of other information.

The second cluster of conspiracy theories has concentrated on Hess's time in prison. There have been claims that the man in Spandau prison was not Hess (principally maintained by a Dr Hugh Thomas, who has conducted an extensive correspondence with us over the years). We are confident that this theory is without foundation. Hess's family and lawyer have never accepted it and it is difficult to imagine why an impostor would maintain his silence for 40 years of

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imprisonment. There have also been allegations that Hess did not commit suicide but was murdered by us to prevent him from telling what he knew. The 4 Powers (UK, US, France and the Soviet Union) responsible for Spandau prison carried out a thorough investigation into the circumstances of Hess's death, including a full autopsy and enquiries by the Special Investigation Branch of the Royal Military Police. The Allied authorities in Berlin issued statements on 24 August and 17 September 1987 making clear that these investigations established beyond doubt that Rudolf Hess committed suicide by hanging himself with an electrical extension cord, and that the cause of death was asphyxiation. No convincing evidence has ever been put forward to contradict this view.

There remains the question of why the KGB is stirring things up. There have been one or two examples in the past of Soviet representatives making remarks designed to stir up controversy about Hess. This occasion however is the most blatant. We assume that the KGB has raised the issue as a high-profile way of demonstrating that it is now an open and acknowledged organisation with, by implication, fewer secrets than Western governments have. There may also be an element of simple mischief-making - in particular in the wake of our decision in May to refuse Tsarev (an identified Intelligence Officer) a visa when he wanted to come here to help launch a book by John Costello, "10 days that saved the West". We consider that the best response to make is to issue straightforward denials of false allegations, and to avoid being drawn into arguments about the details of the various Hess theories.

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