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BF 19/12/80

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

15 December 1980

Dear Bonni,

PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO THE SAS

When the Prime Minister visited 22 SAS at Hereford on Friday of last week, a couple of points were raised with her which she would like to pursue further.

First, the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Rose, told her that our policy for charging other countries for training assistance given to them by the SAS compared very unfavourably with the practice of the French and Germans.

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an FOI Exemption

AWayland  
26 July 2011

The Prime Minister would be grateful if Mr. Pym could let her have, by the end of this week, a note, concerted as necessary with other Departments, explaining what our policy on charging other countries for training assistance is, its justification and how it compares with the practices of our main competitors in the defence sales field.

The second issue raised by Colonel Rose was the SAS's inability to practise what he called "aircraft entry". He said that it was important, if the SAS were to maintain their counter-hijacking skills, to be able to practise their techniques in wide-bodied aircraft. At the moment they had no access to such aircraft: they had tried to borrow wide-bodied jets from British Airways but had been turned down. The result was that other countries were now ahead of us in their ability to deal with terrorist incidents in such aircraft: the German GSG-9 team, for example, had no difficulty whatever in borrowing

/Lufthansa aircraft

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Lufthansa aircraft for this purpose. Colonel Rose went so far as to say that he could not be sure that he could deal successfully with a hijacking incident at Heathrow involving a wide-bodied jet. He wanted to be able to borrow one aircraft a month for 24 hours. No damage would be done to the plane.

Again, the Prime Minister would be grateful if Mr. Pym, after consulting the Secretary of State for Trade as necessary, could let her have a note on this matter by the end of the week. If the position is as Colonel Rose reported it, she is very reluctant to accept that there is nothing we can do about it.

Finally, Colonel Rose mentioned that the Ministry of Defence were considering whether the SAS should have their own dedicated helicopter pilots. The Prime Minister would be glad to know, in due course, what is decided.

I am sending copies of this letter to George Walden (FCO), John Wiggins (Treasury), Stuart Hampson (D/Trade) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours etc,

Heri Whitman.

B.M. Norbury, Esq.,  
Ministry of Defence.

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