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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

14 December 1982

for T. H.

Zimbabwe: Sale of Hunter Aircraft

In your letter of ~~10~~ 2 December you asked whether my letter of 2 December still represented the advice which Mr Pym would wish to put to the Prime Minister before the meeting on Wednesday on the possible sale of these aircraft to Zimbabwe.

I can confirm that this is so.

There are just two developments to report. I said in my letter of 2 December that the trial of the Air Force Personnel would probably take place during the second session of the High Court starting next July. As we mentioned in the briefing for the call by Mr Norman, we have now heard that the trial may be held during the first session, ie in January or February. Secondly, Air Marshall Walsh, Commander of the Zimbabwean Air Force, has told our High Commission that he is very worried indeed about the impact on the largely white-officered Air Force of any decision by us to deny military sales at this stage.

I am copying this to recipients of my earlier letter.

*For me,
R B Bone*

(R B Bone)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

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Zimbabwe P13

UK Relations

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14 DEC 1982

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

2 December 1982

New John, *MP*

Further to Brian Fall's letter of 26 November, I am now able to give you Mr Pym's considered views on the proposed sale of six Hunter aircraft and ground equipment to the Zimbabwe Air Force on commercial terms.

Mr Pym sympathises with Mr Nott's concern about the possibility of domestic criticism, given public interest in the torture of Air Force personnel. However, he believes we should also take into account other important commercial and political considerations.

In view of the conversation Mr Nott had with Mr Mugabe in Harare about the Hunter aircraft, a failure to proceed with the sale would come as a shock to the Zimbabweans. It would inevitably put future military sales (£50m in prospect) in serious jeopardy. Moreover, because the Zimbabwe Government would probably take the view that we were going back on an undertaking, civil public contracts (£200m won since independence and a further £200m now being pursued with a good chance of success) would also be placed at risk.

We should moreover have to face up to the real possibility that the Zimbabwe Government would start looking elsewhere, possibly to the Soviet Union or its surrogates, for help. It is relevant in this context that at a lunch with a number of MPs on 17 November, Mr Ian Smith made a point of emphasising to Mr Onslow that Britain should retain its position as main source of supply for the Air Force.

It is also relevant that there is at the moment something of a power struggle taking place between Mr Usheqokunze, Minister for Home Affairs (a radical) and Mr Mhangagwa, Minister for State Security (more moderate). Mr Chidzero, the pro-Western Minister for Finance and Economic Development, has in the last few days told both us and the Americans that he regards the next few weeks as a possible watershed in government policy, and he has asked that friendly governments should exercise restraint

/and



and avoid any injudicious pressure. A negative decision on the Hunters could have a particularly damaging effect at this delicate stage.

Our High Commission in Harare advise that an adverse Zimbabwean reaction of the kind I have described would become very likely if we delayed our response much longer, for example into the New Year. We could certainly not hope to procrastinate without penalty until after the trial of the Air Force personnel (which will now probably take place during the second session of the High Court starting in July next year).

(later than earlier estimate)

Now more likely in February.
AM 14. 12

In these circumstances, Mr Pym considers that the right decision would be to agree to the sale of the six aircraft without further delay. Other points concerning our relations with Zimbabwe can safely be left until Ministers have considered the broader issues. In confirming to the Zimbabwe Government a decision to sell the Hunters, we would of course take the opportunity to press home our concern that the trial of the Air Force personnel be brought forward.

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram (MOD), Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office) and to John Rhodes (Department of Trade). I also enclose a short background note.

Yours very truly
R B Bone

R B Bone
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
Private Secretary
10 Downing Street



BACKGROUND

Hunter Aircraft and Ground Support Equipment
for the Zimbabwe Air Force (AFZ)

On 25 July almost all the AFZ's operational fighter aircraft were destroyed or badly damaged by sabotage. The Zimbabwe Government asked us to supply six replacement Hunter aircraft (five fighters and one trainer and Hunter ground support equipment). Following Mr Nott's agreement in principle to supply all aircraft and equipment, the Defence Sales Organisation began negotiating details with the AFZ. We do not anticipate any difficulty in obtaining US agreement to a sale of Hunters (the aircraft were originally partially funded under the Mutual Development Aid Programme).

When Mr Nott met Mr Mugabe he confirmed that we were discussing with the Zimbabwe Air Force and Ministry of Defence how we might be able to help over the provision of six Hunter aircraft to replace those destroyed. He said that this might be done either by sale or lease, but the Zimbabweans said they preferred sale.

Despite the current shortage of foreign exchange there are good prospects for other defence sales. The AFZ's intention of purchasing more Hawk aircraft (£17m) has been publicly stated and the Army remain interested in Scorpion (£5m) and Landrovers (£6-8m) and tactical radios (£19m).

Zimbabwe

UK relations



DEC 1982

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PRIME MINISTER

ZIMBABWE: SALE OF HUNTER AIRCRAFT

I have seen the papers from the FCO expressing concern at the likely consequences on our relations with Zimbabwe if the sale of the six Hunter aircraft does not go ahead fairly quickly.

I would support Francis Pym on this. Delay in supplying the aircraft would have a most damaging effect on our civil trade with Zimbabwe, and undo the substantial progress we have made in building up the United Kingdom's share of Zimbabwe's foreign trade. Zimbabwe is likely to become our third most important trading partner in Africa. Maintaining good relations with the Mugabe Government is our best hope of strengthening our position in this market.

I met Richard Hove (Minister for Trade and Commerce) in London recently. I was impressed by personal moderation and his reasonable and realistic approach to future trade with Britain.

It would be a pity to jeopardise our undoubted potential for a worthwhile trading relationship with an important African state because of uncertainties about the sale of these six aircraft.

I am copying this minute to the Foreign Secretary and to the Secretary of State for Defence.

A.C.

Department of Trade
1 Victoria Street
London, SW1H 0ET

LORD COCKFIELD

15 December 1982

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2 DEC 1982



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file B
Zimbabwe

PRIME MINISTER

Your meeting with Mr. Pym and Mr. Nott at 1730 was arranged to discuss the multi-national force in the Lebanon. I attach an MOD letter about this question.

It would also be a convenient time to settle the question of whether or not we are prepared to sell six Hunter aircraft to the Zimbabwe Air Force. I attach papers about that as well.

A. J. COLES

14 December 1982

PRIME MINISTER

ZIMBABWE AIR FORCE

In deciding to postpone a review of general policy towards Zimbabwe, you agreed to take any immediate decisions that were necessary.

One matter on which a decision is needed now is the wish of the Zimbabwe Government to buy six replacement Hunter aircraft following the incident of 25 July when almost all the Zimbabwe Air Force's operational fighter aircraft were destroyed or badly damaged by sabotage.

In a letter of 24 November (Flag A) Mr. Nott took the view that we should not in present circumstances proceed with this sale since, if we did so, it was likely that the aircraft would be delivered before the Air Force detainees were brought to trial and that could lead to considerable criticism.

In a letter of 2 December (Flag B) Mr. Pym argued that we should agree to the sale because:

- (a) The Zimbabwe Government would otherwise consider that we were going back on previous offers of help (Mr. Nott implied to Mugabe that we would either sell or lease the aircraft).
- (b) Refusal to sell would jeopardise further military sales (£50 million in prospect) and perhaps civil contracts as well.
- (c) Zimbabwe might start looking to the Soviet Union or its surrogates for help.
- (d) Mr. Ian Smith had emphasised to Mr. Onslow on 17 November that Britain should retain its position as a main source of supply to the Air Force (Mr. Dennis Norman made a similar point to you yesterday).

/ The FCO have

The FCO have since mentioned two recent developments:

- (a) The trial of the Air Force detainees may now take place in January or February.
- (b) Air Marshal Walsh, Commander of the Air Force, has told our High Commission that he is very worried indeed about the impact on the largely white-officered Air Force of any decision by us to deny military sales at this stage.

A.F.C.

14 December 1982