

Ref. A07196

Copy No 1 of 3

PRIME MINISTER

I attach a copy of a JIC Note (JIC(82)(N) 2) entitled "Intelligence Activities by Warsaw Pact Civil Aircraft over the United Kingdom".

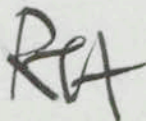
2. The paper was commissioned to assess the nature of the threat posed to our interests by Aeroflot and other Warsaw Pact civil flights which might be engaged in intelligence gathering. This followed an incident on 9 November 1981 when an Aeroflot aircraft deliberately descended below the cloud base at 10,000 feet over the RAF radar station at Boulmer (Mr Coles' letter of 18 December to Mr Omand refers).

3. The JIC Note concludes that some Warsaw Pact civil aircraft are almost certainly being used for the collection of intelligence. At this stage we are unable to assess the extent of the value to the Soviet Union, or to quantify the damage to the United Kingdom from those activities. The evidence so far available does suggest that they complement information from other sources but could also provide some unique material in the fields of photographic and signals intelligence.

4. Further studies are being continued by the Ministry of Defence of modifications noted on some Aeroflot aircraft which might fit them for particular intelligence gathering purposes. The results of these studies are expected within the next 3 months.

5. A meeting of officials from Departments concerned was held on Friday 15 January to consider what follow up action was necessary, particularly with regard to the incident on 1 November, and recommendations are being made to Ministers concerned.

(9 November - see para. 7 of paper).



ROBERT ARMSTRONG

20th January 1982

Foreign and Commonwealth Office document

Reference Diplomatic Report No. 18/82
Description Soviet Union: Annual Review
for 1981

Date 7 January 1982

The above FCO document, which was enclosed on this file has been removed and destroyed.

Such documents are the responsibility of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. When released they are available in the appropriate FCO CLASSES.

Signed A Wayland

Date 18 October 2012

PREM Records Team



file

Soviet Union

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

Intelligence Activities by Warsaw Pact
Civil Aircraft over the United Kingdom

The Prime Minister has seen your minute of 20 January and the attached note by the Joint Intelligence Committee. She has commented that she is concerned at the picture presented of intelligence activities by these aircraft and would like to see the recommendations for follow-up action when these are available.

A. J. COLES

CS

21 January 1982

TOP SECRET UK EYES A



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister

I find this a worrying picture.
Now is it clear what follow-up
action is intended. Would you like
me to say that you are concerned
and would like to see
the recommendation for follow-up
action when these are available?

Yes

A.S.C.

Please

mf



FCS/81/142

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE

Activities of Warsaw Pact Airliners over the UK

1. Thank you for your minute of 10 December.
2. I agree that the intelligence-gathering activities described in your minute are serious and unacceptable. I also agree in principle that we should protest to the Soviet authorities about them. But I understand the incident you describe to be the latest of numerous similar ones. Before taking action with the Russians, I believe it would be sensible to have the complete picture. I understand that the JIC is urgently putting work in hand to this end. I suggest therefore that we await the results of this further study before deciding what form our action should take; any additional delay, now that five weeks have already passed since the incident, should not significantly affect our position.
3. I would have no objection to this and other incidents being publicised once we had taken action with the Russians, provided that in your view this would not reveal too much about our radar capabilities.
4. I am sending copies of this minute to the Prime Minister and other members of OD, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

C
(CARRINGTON)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

22 December 1981

SECRET: UK/US EYES ONLY

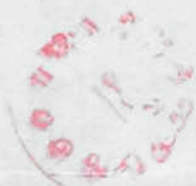
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A-J-C. 2/12.

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COPY NO 2 OF 9

secret*From the Secretary of State*

N.S.P.N.

Amik F/C.O. comment.

A.J.C. ²⁶/₁₂.

The Rt Hon Lord Carrington PC KCMG MC
Secretary of State for Foreign
and Commonwealth Affairs
Whitehall
London SW1

22 December 1981

Dear Peter,

ACTIVITIES OF WARSAW PACT AIRLINERS OVER THE UK

I was glad to see a copy of John Nott's minute to you on this subject dated 10 December. There is no objection on civil aviation grounds to the course of action which he has proposed.

The staff of my Department who grant overflying permission and the Civil Air Traffic Controllers in the Civil Aviation Authority keep in close touch with relevant staff in the Ministry of Defence so that together we are able to keep a close eye on the movements of Soviet Bloc airliners.

Unannounced departures by aircraft from their flight plan present a serious potential hazard to other aircraft which may be flying in the same airspace. I understand that the incident in question occurred outside controlled airspace, but a manoeuvre of this kind, particularly involving a large change of altitude, would present a very grave danger to other aircraft in the more congested conditions of the airways system.

This is an additional reason for making a protest to the Soviet authorities, and I suggest that any announcement that we make should

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From the Secretary of State

add to their embarrassment by drawing attention to this danger. It might perhaps incorporate a sentence on the lines: "An aircraft which departs from its planned flight path without informing air traffic control presents a serious danger of collision to other aircraft flying in the same airspace; this is particularly true where, as in this case, a large unannounced change in altitude occurs".

I am also asking my officials to consider with yours whether in delivering a formal protest to the Russians it should also be made clear to them that we shall have to consider curtailing their overflying rights if such incidents are repeated.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, the other members of OD, and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours

John Biffen

JOHN BIFFEN

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

18 December 1981

Activities of Warsaw Pact Airliners over the UK

The Prime Minister has seen the minute of 10 December by the Secretary of State for Defence to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary. She wonders whether a protest and publicity now, over a month since the incident occurred, might not seem rather belated. In that connection the Prime Minister has asked why it took a month for the proposal to come forward and whether any steps are contemplated to prevent such incidents in future?

The Prime Minister also believes that we ought to be clear about the real nature of the threat posed to our interests by these flights and the extent of damage which we may be suffering. She wonders whether it would be possible for the JIC to produce an assessment covering these points?

I am copying this letter to Brian Fall (FCO) and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

A. J. COLES

David Omand, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence

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Agree that the 20d should be asked
the questions at X below and
that the JIC should assess the
threat posed to our interests by these

Yes no

Wells
AM 15.12
lights?

A. J. L. 17.12

Ref. A06961

MR COLES

The Secretary of State for Defence has copied to the Prime Minister his minute to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary MO 15/3 of 10 December, suggesting that he should publicise an intelligence operation carried out by Aeroflot over the United Kingdom on 9 November and that a protest should be made to the Soviet authorities. There would be no objection (eg from the point of view of protecting the source of the information) to doing so; but it is now over a month since the incident. A protest and publicity now might seem a little belated. It might be worth asking why it took a month for the proposal to come forward; and whether any steps are contemplated to prevent such incidents in future.

X

2. There would seem to be no doubt about the deliberate nature of the incident on 9 November. But if any general action is contemplated to control Warsaw Pact airliner flights over the country, we ought to be clear about the real nature of the threat to our interests and the extent of the damage we may be suffering. This is largely, but not entirely, a military matter, but other Departments will also have views. I think it would be sensible to ask the JIC to produce an assessment, on the strength of which decisions could be taken about any future action to monitor or control these flights.

REA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

17 December 1981

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Prime Minister

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You will wish to note.

MO 15/3



FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY

W

AD 24/12

ACTIVITIES OF WARSAW PACT AIRLINERS OVER THE UK

You will wish to know that the RAF have carried out a special survey on some of the thousand or so Warsaw Pact airliners which fly over the United Kingdom each month.

2. They established that some of these aircraft deviated from their flight plan routes in circumstances which would lead us to assume that they were gathering intelligence.
3. One incident of particular interest took place on 9th November when an Aeroflot IL62 made an unauthorised and unannounced descent from 35,000ft to 10,000ft just below cloud level, to fly over RAF Boulmer, a radar station currently being modernised. It subsequently climbed back to 37,000ft. During this manoeuvre its Secondary Surveillance Radar which automatically broadcasts the aircraft's height was switched off, though it was on immediately before and after the incident. It must, therefore, be assumed that it was switched off intentionally to conceal a deliberate and premeditated manoeuvre. However, it was observed by the air defence radar at Saxton Wold.
4. Our investigations have now revealed that it was the same aircraft which over flew the USN base at Gorton when the first Trident submarine was being launched. You will recall that as a result of this incident the President banned Aeroflot flights over the USA for a short period.



5. I would like us to publish details of the 9th November incident as soon as possible. The Soviet submarine incident in Sweden was of great benefit in convincing Western public opinion that the Soviets are involved in unacceptable activities. We need such publicity to help us in the wider campaign against CND etc. Could you let me know as soon as reasonably possible what you think about a formal protest to the Soviet authorities, together with a public announcement by you or me of our suspicions?

6. I am copying this minute to the Prime Minister, the other members of OD and Sir Robert Armstrong.

JN

Ministry of Defence
10th December 1981