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Brief for Mason Meeting

24.9.1976

Confidential

Overflights

1. The major aspect of the overflight question at present under discussion concerns a British request for permission to make a series of flights up to two kilometres within the state as part of a programme of aerial reconnaissance of illegal Border crossing points and firing points used by terrorists in cross border shooting incidents. The flights would also be used to search for suspect explosive devices and command wires. Permission for these flights was first requested in May last. Some flights were cleared on an ad hoc basis in May. The Government discussed the British request on 24 June and the British Embassy was informed the following day that the request had been approved subject to certain conditions. (A copy of the record of the Government decision is attached in Annex.)

2. In the course of the implementation of the Government's permission it emerged that some of the incidental information on which that decision was based and which had been supplied by the British Embassy was misleading and that, as a result, the project which the British Army envisaged was not compatible technically with the conditions specified by the Government. (As envisaged by the British Army, the project consists of flying a number of strictly parallel flights at a precise height (about 1500 feet) and at a precise distance each from the previous one, thus covering the Border area surveyed with a grid several kilometres long and extending a maximum of two kilometres into the State, The Government specified that no more than one overflight should take place at any one part of the border on the same day. It is clear that, because of the irregular nature of the Border, several of the lines on the grid referred to above will cross the Border several times and, indeed, it is technically necessary to fly all the lines on a particular grid on the same day.)