



# Ministry of Defence

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Ref. 2020/00714

[REDACTED]

13 February 2020

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your e-mail of 17 January 2020 asking for details about RAF aircraft. Specifically, you requested the following information:

*"The purpose of this email is to request the current status of each individual E-3D Sentry AEW1 airborne early warning and control aircraft the RAF has operated. I have been made aware that the Sentry fleet has started to decline in preparation for the E-7 platform. Please see below my questions;*

- 1. In total, how many operational flight hours have been accumulated by each individual Sentry platform since 2018?*
- 2. Are RAF E-3Ds still providing operational support to NATO missions (i.e. Op Shader)?*
- 3. What is the currently operational readiness of the RAF's Sentry fleet as of the end of December 2019/January 2020?*
- 4. How many E-3D Sentry AEW1s have been withdrawn from operational service since the announcement of the E-7 replacement?*
- 5. If question 3 can be provided, what is the reason the fleet is now starting to be phased out?*
- 6. With examples – such as ZH104 – now being placed into storage, I'd like to know where they have been sent for storage, if possible?*
- 7. With numbers dwindling, is there a potential for a capability gap to be created if the E-7 platform is not produced in time for the Sentry's inevitable retirement?*
- 8. Could you provide a timeline for the development and production of the E-7 platform?*
- 9. Could you provide a scheduled out of service date for the RAF's Sentry fleet?*
- 10. Could you provide any updates on the future of the Sentinel R1 fleet?"*

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA). We have now completed a search of our paper and electronic

records for the information you requested and I can confirm that information within the scope of your request is held.

The RAF's fleet of Sentry aircraft have contributed to every major UK Air Operation since its introduction to service with the RAF in 1991. However, they are now ageing and as is eventually the case with all military aircraft, the decision was taken to replace them with a more modern and capable aircraft to meet the UK's future needs. As at 31 December 2019, the Sentry fleet comprised four aircraft (including ZH104), split between three in the forward fleet and one in the sustainment fleet.

Since the decision to purchase the Wedgetail was taken in March 2019, only one of the Sentry fleet (ZH104) has been withdrawn from service and it was placed in storage in the US in January 2020. However, you may wish to note that a further two aircraft had previously been placed in long term storage at RAF Waddington awaiting eventual disposal, although technically, they remain on the military register.

The Sentry fleet continues to routinely conduct NATO missions as part of the UK's broad commitment to NATO Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) operations. The out of service date for Sentry is being kept under review as the transition plans are refined.

Modification of the first Wedgetail airframe is due to start in 2021 with the first aircraft being delivered to the RAF in 2023. Turning to the Sentinel, this is scheduled to leave RAF service in 2021.

We do hold recorded information on the flying hours for each of the UK's Sentry airframes. However, Section 26(1) b of the Act provides that we should withhold information which would be likely to prejudice the capability, effectiveness or security of relevant forces. The Act requires that we have to carry out a public interest (PIT) in this respect to show that the reasons for withholding the information outweigh the reasons for releasing the information.

Even a limited disclosure of the flying hours accumulated across the Sentry fleet would provide a reasonable level of overall understanding of the level of Sentry activity. As a small amount of information has previously been released for Sentry flying hours the public interest in further disclosure of flying hours for each airframe is therefore limited. To release the flying hours for each individual airframe could indicate how many flying hours the aircraft may have left in the airframe design life which would provide potential and actual enemies with information about our capabilities and therefore a tactical advantage to our enemies. There remains a very strong public interest in preserving the RAF's ability to defend the UK and its interests abroad through the effectiveness of its airpower and by withholding tactical information that could aid a potential or actual enemy.

Under Section 16 (Advice and Assistance) of the Act, you may wish to note that in Financial Years 2017/18 and 2018/19 the Sentry fleet undertook some 820 and 780 flying hours respectively.

If you have any queries regarding the content of this letter, please contact this office in the first instance.

If you wish to complain about the handling of your request, or the content of this response, you can request an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, Ground Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail [CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk](mailto:CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk)). Please note that any request for an internal review should be made within 40 working days of the date of this response.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may raise your complaint directly to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not normally investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website at <https://ico.org.uk/>.

Yours sincerely



Secretariat 3a1  
Air Command

