Draft order in preparation for a possible Soviet air attack on Britain from Secretary of State for Defence, E. Shinwell[[1]](#footnote-1), to Prime Minister, C. Attlee, 19 July 1950

TOP SECRET

19 July, 1950

DRAFT ORDER to be kept in a special order book and signed by anyone who has to know

1. No-one seriously imagines that there is any chance of the Russian Air Force suddenly attacking this country.

2. On the other hand they are unpredictable people and we cannot be absolutely certain [that] they will not. And if they did, the American airfields, where so many heavy bombers are concentrated, might be a first objective.

3. So we have got to do something about it, however unlikely it may be. This is the object of these readiness “exercises” now going on. It is obviously useless being at readiness unless you know what to do in the extremely unlikely event of an actual enemy attack.

Your orders in that event are in para. 5 below.

4. It is absolutely essential that no-one but you and the others who sign this order should know about this, which is Top Secret. It might do a great deal of harm and would certainly have serious consequences not only to you but (which I am sure you will agree is more important) to our Services if there was a leak and a headline in the Press that we are expecting a Russian attack – which actually, as I say, we are not.

So you are on your honour to keep this absolutely to yourself. You are not to mention it to anyone – your wife (if you have one) or your best friend, even if he himself has signed this order – except to your Squadron Commander if there is anything you do not understand about it.

Your orders are as follows:

5. If during one of the periods when you are at Exercise readiness with your guns loaded, you are scrambled to investigate an unidentified aircraft or formation, you are to make contact and report numbers, type and markings. If the aircraft carry Russian markings, you should take the following action:

(i) if a single aircraft is seen, e.g. such as might be engaged on Photographic Reconnaissance, surround it and force it to land. If it attempts to escape, fire on it, provided it is over British soil or escaping after having crossed the coast line;

(ii) if a formation of aircraft is seen, do not open fire until it has reached the coast line unless you are first fired on.

If the aircraft carry no markings, or Allied markings, you are to escort them closely, reporting in detail what you see and what they do. If they shoot at you, or drop bombs on British soil, you are to shoot them down.

[TNA, FO 800/456/7]

Keywords: post-war USSR

1. Shinwell, Emanuel Baron Shinwell of Easington (1884-1986) – British politician and Member of Parliament (Labour), Secretary of State for War (1947-1950), Secretary of State for Defence (1950-1951). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)