5-6-2. Interception Procedures

a. General.

1. In conjunction with the FAA, Air Defense Sectors monitor air traffic and could order an intercept in the interest of national security or defense. Intercepts during peacetime operations are vastly different than those conducted under increased states of readiness. The interceptors may be fighters or rotary wing aircraft. The reasons for aircraft intercept include, but are not limited to:

(a) Identify an aircraft;
(b) Track an aircraft;
(c) Inspect an aircraft;
(d) Divert an aircraft;
(e) Establish communications with an aircraft.

2. When specific information is required (i.e., markings, serial numbers, etc.) the interceptor pilot(s) will respond only if, in their judgment, the request can be conducted in a safe manner. Intercept procedures are described in some detail in the paragraphs below. In all situations, the interceptor pilot will consider safety of flight for all concerned throughout the intercept procedure. The interceptor pilot(s) will use caution to avoid startling the intercepted crew or passengers and understand that maneuvers considered normal for interceptor aircraft may be considered hazardous to other aircraft.

3. All aircraft operating in US national airspace are highly encouraged to maintain a listening watch on VHF/UHF guard frequencies (121.5 or 243.0 MHz). If subjected to a military intercept, it is incumbent on civilian aviators to understand their responsibilities and to comply with ICAO standard signals relayed from the intercepting aircraft. Specifically, aviators are expected to contact air traffic control without delay (if able) on the local operating frequency or on VHF/UHF guard. Noncompliance may result in the use of force.

b. Fighter intercept phases (See FIG 5-6-1).
1. **Approach Phase.**
As standard procedure, intercepted aircraft are approached from behind. Typically, intercepter aircraft will be employed in pairs, however, it is not uncommon for a single aircraft to perform the intercept operation. Safe separation between interceptors and intercepted aircraft is the responsibility of the intercepting aircraft and will be maintained at all times.

2. **Identification Phase.**
Interceptor aircraft will initiate a controlled closure toward the aircraft of interest, holding at a distance no closer than deemed necessary to establish positive identification and to gather the necessary information. The interceptor may also fly past the intercepted aircraft while gathering data at a distance considered safe based on aircraft performance characteristics.

3. **Post Intercept Phase.**
An interceptor may attempt to establish communications via standard ICAO signals. In timecritical situations where the interceptor is seeking an immediate response from the intercepted aircraft or if the intercepted aircraft remains noncompliant to instruction, the interceptor pilot may initiate a divert maneuver. In this maneuver, the interceptor flies across the intercepted aircraft's flight path (minimum 500 feet separation and commencing from slightly below the intercepted aircraft altitude) in the general direction the intercepted aircraft is expected to turn. The interceptor will rock its wings (daytime) or flash external lights/select afterburners (night) while crossing the intercepted aircraft's flight path. The interceptor will roll out in the direction the intercepted aircraft is expected to turn before returning to verify the aircraft of interest is complying. The intercepted aircraft is expected to execute an immediate turn to the direction of the intercepting aircraft. If the aircraft of interest does not comply, the interceptor may conduct a second climbing turn across the intercepted aircraft's flight path (minimum 500 feet separation and commencing from slightly below the intercepted aircraft altitude) while expending flares as a warning signal to the intercepted aircraft to comply immediately and to turn in the direction indicated and to leave the area. The interceptor is responsible to maintain safe separation during these and all intercept maneuvers. Flight safety is paramount.

**NOTE-**
1. *NORAD interceptors will take every precaution to preclude the possibility of the intercepted aircraft experiencing jet wash/wake turbulence; however, there is a potential that this condition could be encountered.*

2. *During Night/IMC, the intercept will be from below flight path.*
c. Helicopter Intercept phases (See FIG 5-6-2)

1. Approach Phase.
Aircraft intercepted by helicopter may be approached from any direction, although the helicopter should close for identification and signaling from behind. Generally, the helicopter will approach off the left side of the intercepted aircraft. Safe separation between the helicopter and the unidentified aircraft will be maintained at all times.

2. Identification Phase.
The helicopter will initiate a controlled closure toward the aircraft of interest, holding at a distance no closer than deemed necessary to establish positive identification and gather the necessary information. The intercepted pilot should expect the interceptor helicopter to take a position off his left wing slightly forward of abeam.

3. Post Intercept Phase.
Visual signaling devices may be used in an attempt to communicate with the intercepted aircraft. Visual signaling devices may include, but are not limited to, LED scrolling signboards or blue flashing lights. If compliance is not attained through the use of radios or signaling devices, standard ICAO intercept signals (Table 561) may be employed. In order to maintain safe aircraft separation, it is incumbent upon the pilot of the intercepted aircraft not to fall into a trail position (directly behind the helicopter) if instructed to follow
the helicopter. This is because the helicopter pilot may lose visual contact with the intercepted aircraft.

**NOTE-**
*Intercepted aircraft must not follow directly behind the helicopter thereby allowing the helicopter pilot to maintain visual contact with the intercepted aircraft and ensuring safe separation is maintained.*

**FIG 5-6-2**
Helicopter Intercept Procedures

d. Summary of Intercepted Aircraft Actions. An intercepted aircraft must, without delay:

1. Adhere to instructions relayed through the use of visual devices, visual signals, and radio communications from the intercepting aircraft.

2. Attempt to establish radio communications with the intercepting aircraft or with the appropriate air traffic control facility by making a general call on guard frequencies (121.5 or 243.0 MHz), giving the identity, position, and nature of the flight.

3. If transponder equipped, select Mode 3/A Code 7700 unless otherwise instructed by air traffic control.
NOTE-
If instruction received from any agency conflicts with that given by the intercepting aircraft through visual or radio communications, the intercepted aircraft must seek immediate clarification.

4. The crew of the intercepted aircraft must continue to comply with interceptor aircraft signals and instructions until positively released.
5-6-4. Interception Signals

**TBL 5-6-1 and TBL 5-6-2.**

### TBL 5-6-1

#### Intercepting Signals

**INTERCEPTING SIGNALS**

Signals initiated by intercepting aircraft and responses by intercepted aircraft

(as set forth in ICAO Annex 2-Appendix 1, 2.1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Series</th>
<th>INTERCEPTING Aircraft Signals</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>INTERCEPTED Aircraft Responds</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>DAY-Rocking wings from a position slightly above and ahead of, and normally to the left of, the intercepted aircraft and, after acknowledgement, a slow level turn, normally to the left, on to the desired heading. NIGHT-Same and, in addition, flashing navigational lights at irregular intervals. <strong>NOTE 1</strong>-Meteorological conditions or terrain may require the intercepting aircraft to take up a position slightly above and ahead of, and to the right of, the intercepted aircraft and to make the subsequent turn to the right. <strong>NOTE 2</strong>-If the intercepted aircraft is not able to keep pace with the intercepting aircraft, the latter is expected to fly a series of race-track patterns and to rock its wings each time it passes the intercepted</td>
<td>You have been intercepted. Follow me.</td>
<td>AEROPLANES: DAY-Rocking wings and following.</td>
<td>Understood, will comply.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NIGHT-Same and, in addition, flashing navigational lights at irregular intervals.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HELICOPTERS: DAY or NIGHT-Rocking aircraft, flashing navigational lights at irregular intervals and following.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2 | **aircraft.**
DAY or NIGHT-An abrupt break-away maneuver from the intercepted aircraft consisting of a climbing turn of 90 degrees or more without crossing the line of flight of the intercepted aircraft. | You may proceed. | AEROPLANES: DAY or NIGHT-Rocking wings.
HELICOPTERS: DAY or NIGHT-Rocking aircraft. | Understood, will comply. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | **DAY-Circling aerodrome,** lowering landing gear and overflying runway in direction of landing or, if the intercepted aircraft is a helicopter, overflying the helicopter landing area.
NIGHT-Same and, in addition, showing steady landing lights. | Land at this aerodrome. | AEROPLANES: DAY-Lowering landing gear, following the intercepting aircraft and, if after overflying the runway landing is considered safe, proceeding to land.
HELICOPTERS: DAY or NIGHT-Following the intercepting aircraft and proceeding to land, showing a steady landing light (if carried). | Understood, will comply. |
## Intercepting Signals

### INTERCEPTING SIGNALS

Signals and Responses During Aircraft Intercept

Signals initiated by intercepted aircraft and responses by intercepting aircraft

(as set forth in ICAO Annex 2-Appendix 1, 2.2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Series</th>
<th>INTERCEPTED Aircraft Signals</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>INTERCEPTING Aircraft Responds</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>DAY or NIGHT-Raising landing gear (if fitted) and flashing landing lights while passing over runway in use or helicopter landing area at a height exceeding 300m (1,000 ft) but not exceeding 600m (2,000 ft) (in the case of a helicopter, at a height exceeding 50m (170 ft) but not exceeding 100m (330 ft) above the aerodrome level, and continuing to circle runway in use or helicopter landing area. If unable to flash landing lights, flash any other lights available.</td>
<td>Aerodrome you have designated is inadequate.</td>
<td>DAY or NIGHT-If it is desired that the intercepted aircraft follow the intercepting aircraft to an alternate aerodrome, the intercepting aircraft raises its landing gear (if fitted) and uses the Series 1 signals prescribed for intercepting aircraft.</td>
<td>Understood, follow me.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>DAY or NIGHT-Regular switching on and off of all available lights but in such a manner as to be distinct from flashing lights.</td>
<td>Cannot comply.</td>
<td>DAY or NIGHT-Use Series 2 signals prescribed for intercepting aircraft.</td>
<td>Understood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>DAY or NIGHT-Irregular flashing of all available lights.</td>
<td>In distress.</td>
<td>DAY or NIGHT-Use Series 2 signals prescribed for intercepting aircraft.</td>
<td>Understood.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>