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PRIME MINISTERBELIZE - BRITISH GARRISON

I have seen Francis Pym's minute of 19th April proposing the terms in which you might reply to Premier Price's letter of 9th February.

2. I have already indicated my agreement to postponing the date for the withdrawal of the British Garrison from Belize until 21st September. I recognise that there are many uncertainties at present, but I do not regard these as sufficient reason to postpone withdrawal beyond that date. Belize is an independent country, to which we have no binding defence commitment. We have no strategic interests in Central America. It is anomalous, therefore, that we should retain a permanent garrison in Belize for any longer than is necessary. Moreover, the longer we postpone the withdrawal of the garrison the greater will be the risk that we shall get drawn into the conflicts which are spreading in that highly volatile region.

3. Against this background, I propose that we should concede only three months to Mr Price at this stage, and I suggest that the draft letter should be amended as follows:

Para 1, final sentence: Delete "and that no announced" and add a new sentence, "At this stage we are prepared to agree to the extension of the garrison by a period of three months".



Such an amendment would recognise that we will take further decisions in the light of developments but would avoid Mr Price going away with the idea that our commitment was in any way open-ended. I also wonder whether we should add a sentence to say that we do not intend to make any public statement about our intentions one way or the other.

4. I am copying this minute to OD colleagues.

NHL Grouns (Private Secretary)

[Draft approved by Mr Mott and signed in his absence]

Ministry of Defence

26th April 1982



26 APR 1982

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COMPLIANCE

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