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MO 3/9/4/2 *Is this one Prime Minister*

where we are having To note,
a state visit from

PRIME MINISTER *Oman next year*
and she is a good friend of Britain. *5/41*
GULF PATROL

As you know, following President Carter's approach to you last year, we have maintained since last October two warships on patrol in the Gulf of Oman. This requires four warships and an average of three Royal Fleet Auxiliaries to be deployed East of Suez for most of the time. The cost of the operation is considerable - over £14m a year. Moreover, so long as ships have been required to remain at immediate notice in the Gulf of Oman it has not been possible to programme them to make visits to ports in the area in support of our general defence and foreign policy objectives.

2. The war between Iran and Iraq has settled down to a stalemate which could drag on indefinitely. We cannot discount the threat of isolated incidents against merchant shipping, particularly given the current internal chaos in Iran, but the threat of general disruption to shipping passing through the southern end of the Gulf, which was very real at the outbreak of the war, seems to have receded.

3. I have therefore agreed to an adjustment in the present pattern of deployment. Ships will in future be put on a maximum of seven days notice to reach the Straits of Hormuz. This will enable us to reduce for much of the time the number of warships required to be East of Suez from four to two (and so the cost of the operation) while at the same time allowing greater flexibility for visits to the Indian Ocean states such as Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka, and possibly also some of the Gulf States.



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