



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
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MO 3/9/4/2

Prime Minister

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12th November 1981

Don Michael,

Phil 13/11

[Handwritten signature]

GULF PATROL

below — Thank you for your letter of 6th November.

We have not so far briefed the Sultan of Oman, though the FCO intends to issue guidance to Gulf posts on the change of notice for the ships on Patrol and to invite posts to brief host governments. The Defence Secretary shares the Prime Minister's views on the importance of carrying the Omanis with us, not least because of the considerable, if essentially discreet, support which they have provided to the Royal Navy in the conduct of the Patrol. He does not envisage that the change of notice will prompt any adverse reaction from the Sultan. We shall emphasise to the Omanis that we are retaining the flexibility to resume a constant patrol in the Straits of Hormuz area should this be necessary and that, whilst the Patrol would be placed at a maximum of 7 days' notice, for much of the time ships will be at shorter notice and will continue to deploy regularly in waters off the coast of Oman. We will also make it clear to Oman that ships on Patrol will continue to provide sea training for officers of the Sultan of Oman's Navy, and other training, on an opportunity basis - though the frequency of opportunity will inevitably decline.

You also asked about port visits. On the advice of HMA Muscat, visits to Muscat by ships on Patrol are currently limited to one visit every 6 months or so. This is in deference to Omani sensitivities about not being seen to be too closely associated with the Patrol. Indeed at the outset of the patrol, the Omanis had indicated that, whilst visits for emergency repairs would be acceptable, visits for recreational purposes would not. This earlier attitude has now softened and a very successful ship visit took place in early June. A second visit is not likely before December. Another important

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consideration is that independent recreational facilities in Muscat are almost non-existent, and hospitality for visiting ships' companies falls very heavily on the relatively small British community. We feel that it is not reasonable to over-tax this hospitality, which in June was most generous.

I am copying this letter to Francis Richards (FCO), John Rhodes (DOT), and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely
John Dawson

(J D S DAWSON)



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