

PRIME MINISTER

SUPPLY OF DEFENCE EQUIPMENT TO SYRIA

You will remember that in a minute of 5 April (Flag A) the Defence Secretary reported a formal Syrian request for a large range of military equipment - namely, Challenger tanks, Jaguar aircraft, Hawk trainer aircraft, Rapier and an early warning radar system.

You said that you would like reactions to this proposal in writing. The Trade Secretary (Flag B) favours exploratory talks with the Syrian Defence Minister at least about those arms which we had previously said we were prepared to supply. The Chancellor (Flag C) shares the general concern about supplying such defence equipment to Syria, doubts whether they could pay for it, but favours a low-key exploratory response.

A discussion (Flag D) between our Ambassador and the Syrian Defence Minister in early May gave no confidence that the Syrian request was a serious one and produced the new information, if it can be believed, that the Libyans would finance the deal.

It is worth your reading in full the Foreign Secretary's analysis of the various factors which is at Flag E. This sets out clearly all the arguments against supply. But he also believes that we should encourage pro-Western tendencies in Syria and draws attention to the fact that we have already cleared the supply of Hawk trainer aircraft and the daylight version of the Rapier. He therefore favours avoiding an outright refusal - and instead conducting further discussions with the Syrians to see how serious their approach is and to encourage <sup>them</sup> the Syrians to restrict their interest to the less contentious items.

The Defence Secretary has now suggested (Flag F) that MOD staff at middle/senior management level should visit Damascus in early July to make this contact. The Foreign Secretary accepts

/ this suggestion



this suggestion but emphasises that all the reasons for caution that he has set out earlier must still apply and that we should not arouse undue expectations. This would be satisfactory to the Chancellor.

Do you therefore agree that one or more MOD officials should visit Damascus in July to conduct discussions on the basis set out by the Foreign Secretary?

A.S.C.

Reluctantly yes. But I really  
do not think we could supply  
most of the things they allegedly  
seek. not

24 May 1984