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Prime Minister.

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PRIME MINISTER

MSV

DEPLOYMENT OF A MCM FORCE TO THE MEDITERRANEAN

Following our decision in Cabinet to send a MCM force to the Mediterranean as a precautionary deployment in view of the situation in the Gulf I thought you would like to know the latest plans for the movements of the group.

2. The four MCMVs will leave their UK ports (Rosyth and Portsmouth) on 26th March and will arrive at Gibraltar on 31st March - 1st April. A support ship (OIL ENDEAVOUR) has been taken up from trade and is now being converted at Rosyth. If this proceeds smoothly she should be ready to leave the UK about 31st March and arrive at Gibraltar about 6th April.

3. If the situation in the Gulf deteriorates the ships can proceed directly through the Suez Canal to the Indian Ocean. At the moment this does not appear to be necessary and the current plan is that the complete force will leave Gibraltar on 14th/15th April. This time at Gibraltar will enable the ships to carry out essential work on completing the storing and maintenance of the ships, following a relatively hurried departure from the UK, and weapons testing on the range at Gibraltar. It will also enable the force to exercise together for the first time. I am sure this period is essential at the start of what may be a long deployment. Unless the force is sent to the Gulf the next major event in their programme will be participation in the NATO MCM exercise off Sicily from 1st - 16th May which is, as you know, the cover story for the despatch of the force. From 15th April to 1st May the force will sail to the Eastern Mediterranean and, subject to Foreign Office views, will possibly pay a short visit to Crete.



4. We can consider the movements of the force after the end of the NATO exercise nearer the time, taking account of the situation in the Gulf.

5. I am sending copies of this minute to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, Secretary of State for Trade, Secretary of State for Energy, Secretary of State for Transport and Sir Robert Armstrong.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "Wright".

Ministry of Defence
28th March 1984



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