



Prime Minister

Agree x1 and y1?

FERB

24.5.

MO 3/9/4/2

Yes no

PRIME MINISTERDEPLOYMENT OF THE MCM FORCE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

When I minuted you about this deployment on 28th March, I suggested that the future movements of the force might be re-considered when the planned NATO exercise was complete. The force is now visiting Cyprus and Taranto and will then move to Cyprus until mid-June.

While the force remains in the Mediterranean it will need base facilities. When the decision to deploy to the Eastern Mediterranean was taken, Cyprus was assumed to be the obvious choice. However, the Royal Navy have since investigated the limited facilities at Akrotiri in the Sovereign Base Areas and it is clear that they would be technically unsuitable. The other options (apart from Gibraltar which is 24 days from the Gulf) therefore depend upon the goodwill of a friendly government. We have assessed the various possibilities in conjunction with the FCO (and where appropriate with posts).

There are political difficulties attaching to all the alternatives in the Eastern Mediterranean - Republic of Cyprus, Greece, Turkey, Israel and Egypt. This leaves Italy as the most forward option for a base. There is no reason to suppose that the Italians will object. Although Italy is 4 days further from the Gulf than Cyprus the main elements of the force will spend much of their time on exercises and visits in the Eastern Mediterranean (for which no



x | difficulty is foreseen) and will then be more rapidly available for the Gulf. I therefore propose, subject to colleagues' agreement, that we should approach the Italian Government with a request for facilities for the force at a suitable base in Southern Italy or Sicily.

y | Looking further ahead a programme for the force has been drawn up until the end of August, when the support ship's charter is due for renewal. Subject to developments in the Gulf, I propose that we review the future of the force at about that time. In deciding whether to renew the contract for the hire of the support ship, we will of course have to consider the option of returning the whole force to the UK.

Copies of this letter go 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.


Ministry of Defence
24th May 1984