

IO 3/9/4/2

PRIME MINISTERDEPLOYMENT OF THE MINE COUNTERMEASURES FORCE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

My minute to you of 24th May on the deployment of our mine countermeasures force to the Mediterranean proposed that we should review the future of the force during August. In fact, a decision is needed by 7th August since the support ship Oil Endeavour must leave Italy by that time if she is to be converted back to her normal configuration before her contract expires on 24th September. If the force is required to stay in the Mediterranean, the extra cost of continuing the deployment for a further 6 months would be some £1 million, largely consisting of charter charges for the support vessel.

2. The original decision to send an MCM force to the Mediterranean was of course taken in response to a direct American request. The deployment undoubtedly had a valuable political effect both on the United States and on our friends in the Gulf (in particular the Omanis who had previously expressed interest in such a deployment). But in the light of developments since then I am not convinced that the arguments in favour of a continued deployment are as strong as they were. Since the original decision was taken in March it has become clear that the principal threat to shipping in the Gulf comes from airborne attacks from both belligerents. The threat of mining, always low, appears to have receded further. The Iranians have made it clear that they would only consider mining the Straits of Hormuz if their oil exports from the Gulf were completely cut off and, despite attacks against shipping using the Kharg terminal, there seems to be little prospect of Iraq achieving this.

Prime Minister
 This seems good sense,
 though it would be
 friendly to warn the Americans
 before a final decision.
 Agree subject to this
 Yes, not condition & the views of colleagues?

CDD

27/7



3. In these circumstances the maintenance of a British MCM force in the Mediterranean looks increasingly irrelevant from the viewpoint of military need. From a political standpoint also, I think that the circumstances have changed. In particular the mood in Washington has hardened against any suggestion of military intervention in the Gulf, no doubt not least in view of the forthcoming election. Also, the Omanis have shown no particular desire for the force to remain in close proximity, and have been satisfied with our recent gesture of support in the form of the temporary deployment of a maritime reconnaissance Nimrod. I would therefore judge that it is not necessary to retain the force for political reasons, and I recommend that it be withdrawn to the United Kingdom.

4. I am sending copies of this minute to colleagues on OD and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Ministry of Defence
26th July 1984

IRAQ
PT4



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27 JUL 1994

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