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SECRET

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Prime Minister (Copy No. 1)

MEDICAL SUPPORT FOR BRITISH FORCES MIDDLE EAST

I received a copy of Tom King's 14 December minute about the deployment of medical support in the Middle East. I would support his proposals.

2. I believe that the handling of casualties would be assisted by the availability of Military Hospitals, both as a first call resource on day 1 of the conflict while the NHS is running down its non-urgent cases to free beds, and because the MOD hospitals provide a base of expertise and valuable facilities (especially their intensive care).

3. All NHS Regions have been drawn into our operational plan for receiving war casualties. The choice of a Territorial Unit from Scotland is therefore helpful to us. Overall, however, the number of reservists who might be called upon would be comparatively small when spread across the country as a whole. I understand that in all some 165 doctors (40 or so hospital specialists and many of the rest GPs) and 500 or so nurses would be required along with technicians and stretcher bearers.

4. We would not want to lose in this call-out those scarce specialists from areas like burns, spinal injuries or neurology where the hospital units would be under heavy pressure in the event of war. But the arrangements in paragraph 9 of the minute suggest that the Ministry of Defence could exercise some scrutiny of volunteers, and might be able to liaise with officials here if there seemed to be a danger of weakening a key super-specialist unit.

5. I welcome the Treasury decision to enable topping up of pay to be centrally financed.

6. I am copying this minute to Tom King (Copy No. 2) and those who received his minute.

W W

W W

Secretary of State for Health
December 1990

