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10 DOWNING STREET
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From the Private Secretary

9 August 1988

Dear Brian

ARMILLA PATROL

The Prime Minister had a highly successful visit to HMS Manchester on the Armilla Patrol in the Gulf on 9 August and has written to thank those concerned. A number of points emerged from the visit on which the Prime Minister would welcome the Defence Secretary's comments. The main ones are:

- it was represented to the Prime Minister that there was insufficient ammunition available to the ships of the Armilla Patrol for training purposes. The Prime Minister would like to know if this is indeed the case and what steps are in hand to remedy it. Even allowing for expenditure constraints, this would seem a dangerous area in which to economise.
- it was also suggested that the senior officers of the Armilla Patrol were not given any latitude whatsoever on matters of public presentation of their role in the Gulf. Instead every single request, even the smallest, had to be referred to MOD. While it is obviously the case that naval officers must work within very clear guidelines, it seemed to the Prime Minister that the present policy is too restrictive. Again she would welcome the Defence Secretary's comments.
- the point was also made to the Prime Minister that the training margin (which I took to mean the scope to allow officers and men adequate time away from operational duties to undertake training) was inadequate. The Prime Minister would like the Defence Secretary's views on this point as well.

I should underline that these points were elicited under strenuous questioning by the Prime Minister and were not volunteered by the senior officers whom she met.

The Prime Minister was particularly struck by the fact that all to whom she spoke expressed great satisfaction with the Rules of Engagement for the Armilla Patrol. The Prime Minister was also very impressed by the high professional standards and

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

state of readiness of HMS Manchester, which she understands is matched by the other ships of the Armilla Patrol and the MCMVs. She would like her impressions, together with her congratulations on the high standards attained, brought to the attention of the Chief of the Defence Staff and the Chief of the Naval Staff.

I am copying this letter to Stephen Wall (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

Yours truly,
Chris Powell

C. D. POWELL

Brian Hawtin, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence

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