

Pym puts off his Mideast trips

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By Denis Taylor

Mr Francis Pym, the new Foreign Secretary, will not be going to Syria and Jordan next week for the visits planned by Lord Carrington, because of the crisis over the Falkland Islands. It was being emphasized in Whitehall last night that the trips to Damascus and Amman have been postponed, not cancelled.

Even before Lord Carrington's resignation, the possibility of the visits taking place had looked extremely remote.

But last night there were no plans to change arrangements for the meeting of British and Spanish foreign ministers at Sintra, Portugal on April 20 for talks on the future of Gibraltar. This is the date on which the Spaniards are due to open the gates on their side of the frontier with Gibraltar.

The great importance which Madrid attaches to a whole range of developments involving Britain is appreciated in London. These include prospective Spanish membership to the EEC and Nato, as well as the opening of the Gibraltar border.

Whitehall sources would not be drawn into commenting on the enthusiasm with which the Argentine invasion of the Falklands has been greeted in some circles on the Spanish right, beyond saying that the British Government was aware of these sentiments.

There is, in any case, no obvious parallel between the Spanish and Argentine claims on British territories. Spain has tried to exert pressure over Gibraltar for years, but a military intervention has not been in prospect.

Mr Pym's first day at the Foreign Office included extensive briefings on the Falklands crisis. He had to prepare himself for the formidable task of opening for the Government in the debate on the Falklands in the Commons today.

It was being underlined that his becoming Foreign Secretary does not imply any change of policy, whatever changes of emphasis or style may emerge from the new holder of the office.

The point of departure for British foreign policy remains the United Nations Security Council resolution demanding Argentine withdrawal from the Falklands. The sailing of the naval task force for the South Atlantic was depicted as being intended to strengthen diplomacy, while the overall aim remained to avoid war.

But it was also being emphasized that the withdrawal of the Argentine occupying forces from the islands remained an absolute condition for any settlement.

It has apparently been clear to the United States that if Washington was thinking in terms of any political initiatives, a solution would have to involve the removal of the Argentine troops.

President Reagan has said that America would do all that it could to achieve a peaceful solution to the conflict.

As well as having to cope with the finer points of the crisis, Mr Pym is already finding out that a foreign secretary cannot focus on one subject exclusively at a time. The office involves coping with a constant flow of advice and discussions