

MEMORANDUM TO CABINET BY THE MINISTER OF COMMONWEALTH
AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Emergency evacuation scheme for Libya

Officials of the British Embassy in Tripoli have recently informed the Embassy of Malta that they are on the point of submitting to London an evacuation scheme in case of emergency. Although no details were given it was stated that this scheme would include persons of Maltese descent.

2. It appears that the vagueness of the information is a result of the June 1967 emergency scheme by which Maltese citizens were to be included in the British evacuation plans. At that time the decision to include Maltese citizens may have been taken in haste because of the sudden outbreak of hostilities between Israel and her Arab neighbours. It is pointed out that the British Government appear to be quite willing to carry on as previously but in order to avoid any suspicion of interference the British Government would prefer to be assured on this point.

3. It is therefore considered necessary to re-examine the whole question of the evacuation of Maltese citizens from Libya in an emergency. An emergency does not now exist and it is hoped that an emergency will not occur but it is preferable to consider this matter in normal circumstances and to be prepared in any future eventuality.

4. In order to arrive at a decision Hon. Ministers may find useful the following information:-

Number of Maltese citizens in Libya (as on 25/1/69)

Tripoli registered with Embassy of Malta	180
not registered (estimated)	<u>25</u>
Total residents	205
number of businessmen at any one time in Tripoli	<u>10</u>
Total	215
Cyrenaica: registered with Embassy of Malta	10
not registered	(Not known)

5. As far as existing plans are concerned Tripoli is divided into areas, and in each case a person is selected as a contact with the Embassy of Malta. This individual will pass on an order for evacuation and using transport available assemble the Maltese in the area in a predetermined spot. It is then up to the Embassy of Malta to arrange for transport from these mustering areas to the point of evacuation. This plan is modified where groups already exist, such as nuns, Wheelus base employees etc.

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6. This plan was worked out and completed during June 1967, but the departure of a number of prominent Maltese has since created gaps. At the same time it is feared that if approaches are made to other Maltese to fill these gaps, a feeling of uneasiness might be created, if not panic, and therefore as long as the situation is calm no remedial measures have so far been adopted.

7. The present plans of the British Embassy are not known and the scheme existing in 1967 is now inadequate since this was based on the presumption of the presence of British forces in Tripoli and control of Idris Airport by the R.A.F.

8. In these circumstances it is for consideration whether it is expedient to rely on a friendly nation to safeguard Maltese citizens or to assume full responsibility for their safe evacuation. Politically to rely on a friendly nation might implicate us in a foreign policy with which we might not be in full agreement. It may also be misconstrued as a renunciation of a national duty.

9. It is understood that the Maltese Community in Tripoli were averse to the idea of being included in the British evacuation scheme because of the Anti-British ferment existing at that time. This feeling, of course, was the result of charges that Britain and America had actively assisted Israel during the war. This situation may, or may not, arise in the future. Consideration was being given to the possibility of using a Malta Airlines Viscount and a Maltese vessel to evacuate Maltese citizens.

10. It must be pointed out that the evacuation of approximately 250 Maltese citizens in an emergency is not an easy matter with our limited resources. It can be done, of course, provided we can supply planes and/or ships. The Maltese in Cyrenaica would, in all probability, still have to be looked after by the British. There is on the other hand, a vital factor in this question viz. the safety of men, women and children is of paramount consideration and it would seem to override any other consideration.

11. Hon. Ministers are asked to advise whether an approach should be made to the British Government in order that Maltese citizens might be included in any British evacuation plans or whether the Maltese Government should undertake to prepare, immediately, plans for the evacuation of Maltese citizens in case of trouble.

24th February, 1969.