

MEMORANDUM FOR THE CABINET
BY THE HON. PRIME MINISTER

Agreement on Mutual Defence and Assistance
Training and Exercise Areas

Section 5(3) of Part 3 of the Agreement on Mutual Defence and Assistance provides that "the British Authorities will be afforded the use of such areas outside service establishments and under such conditions as may be agreed from time to time with the Authorities of Malta for landing exercises and other periodic training and exercises of the British forces: provided that the British Authorities shall give the Authorities of Malta such prior notice as may be agreed of their requirement to use such areas".

2. Hon. Ministers will recollect that, in relation to this provision, they had considered the recommendations in Memorandum No. 282 of 24th August, 1964, and had agreed that, with regard to landing exercises the Services be allowed to use Mellieha and Ghajn Tuffieha Bays during the period November-March only, and that any landing exercises carried out, outside this period, should be confined to Armier Bay and Ramla tat-Torri Bay, and that with regard to periodic training and exercises, the Services be offered the San Annard area as an alternative troop training area to Marfa Ridge. This was in accordance with Government policy, which had been made known to the Services as far back as February, 1964, that the northern part of the Island should be kept as free as possible from military activity, in the interests of tourist development.

3. The Services accepted all the Government's requirements, as shown in Memorandum No. 282, with the exception that they wished to reconsider the demand for the surrender of the military camps at Ghadira and Ghajn Tuffieha in 6 months' time, and that they wished to have an indication of the geographical extent of the area at San Annard, proposed for troop training.

4. In the meantime, since 21st September, 1964, requests for various forms of troop training ranging from simple patrolling, map-reading and guarding of particular points to field exercises involving the use of pyrotechnics and blank ammunition have been received at frequent intervals from the Services, all involving areas in the northern part of the Island which used to be used prior to Independence. The question of an alternative area at San Annard or elsewhere was being discussed by the Commissioner of Land with the Services, and in the meantime, in the spirit of cooperation inherent in the Agreement and also in order not to risk being in breach of the Agreement the Services requests were with

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legal advice acceded to, without prejudice to arrangements for an agreed training area. Another factor which militated in favour of this attitude was that it was the off-peak tourist season and that such exercises would not materially affect tourist development in the area at this stage.

5. There has as yet been no agreement on an alternative training area. San Annard has proved to be unsatisfactory because of the extent of cultivated land in the area, and it appears very much that the difficulty of finding a suitable area in such a small densely populated country, will have to lead to a re-appraisal of Government policy regarding troop training in the north.

6. The British Authorities say, with some truth, that the northern part of the Island is more suitable for training because there is less cultivation, quite large areas are desolate and there are few villages. Country like this means that there are less restrictions on training and less damage is done. The British Authorities likewise say that, with two British regiments on the Island, it is absolutely essential that they should have every facility to keep the units in first class condition otherwise there would be grave reasons why the regiments should not be kept here at all if they cannot be maintained in proper fighting trim.

7. It is a military fact, that for training to be effective, it must have variety, and to concentrate training into too small an area would nullify its purpose.

8. We are therefore faced with the fact that whilst striving to change the basis of our economy, we still have to rely on Service spending to a degree which we cannot afford to ignore, and the presence of two British regiments, with their families is the source of a not insignificant contribution to our economy.

9. It is therefore for Hon. Ministers' consideration whether, in view of the above facts, it should not be conceded that the British Authorities be allowed for the time being to continue to carry out training in the north (where there has been no appreciable development so far) which they cannot reasonably carry out elsewhere, and that as far as possible such training be restricted to the period November-March, as in the case of landing exercises.

30th March, 1965.