

MEMORANDUM FOR THE CABINET  
BY THE HON. PRIME MINISTER

Malta Defence Agreement - Training and Exercise Areas

In connection with the provisions of Section 5 of Part 3 of the draft Defence Agreement, talks have been held with local representatives of the Services at official level on the subject of certain areas required by the Services for the purpose of carrying out training and exercises.

2. The Services' claims have been examined in relation to the Government's plans for tourist development and to the needs of the local fishing industry, and the following conclusions have been reached by the Malta side at official level:

- (a) The Navy and the Army in combination carry out beach-landing exercises about twice a year for periods lasting about a week each time. These exercises are carried out either at Ghajn Tuffieha Bay or Mellieha Bay depending on the direction of the prevailing wind. The Malta representatives have made it clear to the Services that these exercises should be carried out outside the accepted tourist season i.e. April to October, and that they should endeavour to make use of Armier Bay instead. The Services are examining the possibilities of Armier Bay, but in any event there appears to be no objection to their using either Ghajn Tuffieha Bay or Mellieha Bay between November and March for exercises which are normally limited to two weeks in a year;
- (b) The Navy use Mellieha Bay during the winter months only as a training ground for their under-water teams. There is no evident objection to their continuing to do so;
- (c) The Navy have undertaken to notify all H.M. ships of the pot-fishing, anchored-line and kannizzati areas. Large-scale minesweeping exercises will continue to be notified to the Government. These exercises take place inshore of the kannizzati floats. With regard to Filfla, the Navy will ensure that no firing takes place after noon between 1st May and 15th August. Night firing will only take place on the five days of the full moon. The Senior Fisheries Officer finds no objection so long as the actual times of firing are

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notified to him, and he also considers the arrangements for the avoidance of fishing areas by H.M. ships to be workable. Claims for compensation for damage to fishing equipment are provided for in the main Agreement;

- (d) As regards land areas, the localities concerned are the ranges at Ghajn Tuffieha and Tal Majesa, the two military camps at Ghajn Tuffieha and Ghadira respectively, and Marfa Ridge which is used for periodical troop training. The Services are prepared to give up the classification range at Ghajn Tuffieha and concentrate all their classification ranges within the Pembroke area. Subject to Ministry of Defence approval, they are prepared to give up either of the military camps at Ghajn Tuffieha and Ghadira, but not both. They say that there is a Hafmed requirement for the Ghajn Tuffieha camp in war-time. They are also willing to agree to a re-siting of the field-firing range at Tal Majesa. The Malta representatives consider that both the camp at Ghajn Tuffieha and that at Ghadira should be given up since there are no grounds for their remaining in those particular localities with their tourist development potential. As to the re-siting of the field-firing range at Tal Majesa, an exhaustive study of possible localities on the map has shown that it will be extremely difficult to find an alternative site which would both meet the terrain requirements of this particular type of range, and at the same time cause no inconvenience to the civilian population or to fishing and coastal craft. In fact, the Malta representatives are inclined to conclude that, with due respect to the Government's directive for complete clearance of the northern part of the Island, the retention by the Services of the Tal Majesa range would probably be in the Government's best interests, since the land there is barren, is not susceptible to tourist development and is unlikely to cause inconvenience to any tourist localities in the area. Moreover, the sea off the Tal Majesa coast is the site of strong cross-currents which make it dangerous for bathing. It would therefore be more advantageous to the Government to allow the Services to retain an unwanted and virtually useless site than to go to the trouble and expense of providing an alternative site, if it can be found, which might have some agricultural, development, or other value.

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- (e) The Services agree to carry out periodical troop training in an area other than Marfa Ridge, provided that the alternative is suitable. The Malta representatives propose that the Services should be offered the choice of (a) the San Annard area, (b) the Fomm ir-Rih area, and (c) the coastal area between Haġar Qim and Dingli.

3. Hon. Ministers are kindly requested to say whether they agree that 2(a), (b) and (c) can be accepted and whether they agree that (i) the evacuation of the camps at Ghajn Tuffieha and Ghadira should be insisted upon, that (ii) the Tal Majesa range may be retained by the Services, and (iii) that the troop-training areas proposed as an alternative to Marfa Ridge may be offered to the Services.

13th May, 1964.