

MEMORANDUM TO CABINET PRESENTED BY THE MINISTER
OF COMMONWEALTH AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

NATO "on call force"

Early in December 1968 the Secretary-General of NATO mentioned to the Diplomatic Agent of Malta to NATO the fact that a feasibility study on an "on call force" in the Mediterranean was due from SACEUR in January for submission to the Ministerial Meeting of NATO on the 16th January 1969. He gave broad outlines of the scheme to the Diplomatic Agent mentioning that it would be under the control of NAVsouth and that it would be convenient for the force to collect in Malta. The Secretary-General asked for Malta's reactions.

2. The Diplomatic Agent was asked to explain to the Secretary-General that it was difficult for Malta to give her reactions in the absence of full information. The Diplomatic Agent conveyed this message to the Secretary-General on the 6th January and further verbal information was given to the Diplomatic Agent on the 13th January when he was informed that a written memorandum on the subject would be given to him on the 21st January. This was done and a copy is attached.

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3. Acting on instructions, the Diplomatic Agent informed the Secretary-General on the 21st January that:

(1) If it was NATO's desire that the "on call force" should be assembled in Malta then the Government of Malta would require a written request for consideration by the Cabinet;

(2) If NAVsouth in Malta assumed command of the "on call force", it would constitute a change in the operational role of NAVsouth and, in the absence of defence guarantees from NATO, this change in role would require a careful appraisal by the Government of Malta;

(3) The Government of Malta was in favour of closer ties with NATO but was also under internal political pressure. It was for these reasons, in addition to necessity, that the Government attached importance to infrastructure aid as in that way tangible benefits would be shown to accrue from the close ties with NATO.

4. The Secretary-General appreciated the need for making an official request to the Government of Malta and appeared to be of the view that the most practical form that the request should take would be to ask for a blanket clearance in principle (presumably for the collection of the fleet from time to time in Malta) followed by simple prior notification whenever

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assembly was necessary which could conceivably be, at times, at very short notice. The Secretary-General did not appear to share the view that the allocation of the "on call force" to NAVsouth would represent a change in the operational role of that command. The "on call force" was merely a re-grouping of the forces already under the command of NAVsouth.

5. It is not likely that NATO would go ahead with the allocation of the "on call force" to NAVsouth without obtaining clearance from Malta. However, NATO may feel that it can confidently expect an affirmative reply because otherwise there would be operational restriction on a command which Malta had accepted on her territory. Such restriction would not be acceptable to NATO and NATO may have then to consider re-locating NAVsouth outside Malta.

6. It is not likely that NATO will make a formal request without having an indication beforehand of the reaction from Malta. It is, therefore, necessary to decide now what this re-action should be. The alternatives open are either that Malta accepts the "on call force" without qualification, or that she accepts the force provided defence guarantees are extended by NATO, or, if defence guarantees are not forthcoming, that Malta "withdraws" from the 1965 Resolution. It is to be noted in this context that a defence guarantee was sought from NATO in 1965 and there were juridical difficulties which prevented NATO from extending the guarantees. On the other hand without such guarantees Malta may find herself in a situation which could conceivably become diplomatically difficult if, for example, the Soviet Union were to advise Malta that as a non-member of NATO her acceptance of the allocation of the "on call force" would be considered an unfriendly act. This possibility is somewhat remote, but in the absence of a defence guarantee Malta's position could become difficult.

7. Irrespective of whether a formal request is made, Ministers are asked for a decision on Malta's reaction.

5th February, 1969.

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PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM SECRETARY-
GENERAL BROSIO TO AMBASSADOR GEORGE CURMI

I would like to inform you that at its meeting on 16th January, 1969, the Defence Planning Committee in Permanent Session adopted a concept for the creation of an "on call" Naval Force for the Mediterranean.

Under this concept a modest "on call force" would be founded on a nucleus of at least three modern ships of destroyer escort size or larger (to be provided by Italy, the U.K. and the U.S.), to be expanded to a minimum of six with other types of ships (patrol craft size or larger) to be provided by the Mediterranean countries depending on the area of operation. These ships should have good ASW capability.

It is foreseen that additional arrangements should be made to allow other vessels to augment the force depending on the situation. In order to train in the ASW role the services of one or more submarines are necessary and these should be provided by the country in whose general area the forces were operating. Additionally submarines of other nations might be required.

The role of the force will be to demonstrate the solidarity of NATO nations and to contribute to the overall deterrent in the Mediterranean. The force will be called up primarily for exercises and other peacetime tasks in the Mediterranean: it is envisaged that it will engage in training exercises in at least two training periods a year each of about 15 days and normally in connection with exercises, it will visit various ports to show itself with its multinational flags as a symbol of NATO solidarity and unity. It may be called up to demonstrate NATO naval presence in a threatened area.

Subject to normal political control the force will be called together for training exercises by SACEUR with the concurrence of the nations participating. The exercise programme for the "on call force" will, together with any related port visits, be included in SACEUR's Annual Exercise Programme.

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The political controls and related procedures under which the "on call force" may be called together and/or deployed towards threatened areas are to be considered further by the Military Committee and the Defence Planning Committee in Permanent Sessions.

The concept foresees that the "on call" Naval Force for the Mediterranean will come under the overall command of SACEUR and the actual details of the operational command are yet to be decided on the basis of the proposals which the Military Committee will be submitting for approval to the Defence Planning Committee.

Brussels,
21st January, 1969.

L-ARKIVJI NAZZJONALI TA' MALTA

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