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DEFENCE AND OVERSEA POLICY COMMITTEE

SUB-COMMITTEE ON THE SOUTH ATLANTIC AND
THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

MINUTES of a Meeting held at
10 Downing Street on
TUESDAY 15 JUNE 1982 at 9.30 am

PRESENT

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon William Whitelaw MP
Secretary of State for the
Home Department

The Rt Hon John Nott MP
Secretary of State for Defence

The Rt Hon Cecil Parkinson MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of
Lancaster and Paymaster General

THE FOLLOWING WERE ALSO PRESENT

The Rt Hon Sir Michael Havers QC MP
Attorney General

Admiral of the Fleet
Sir Terence Lewin
Chief of the Defence Staff

Sir Antony Acland
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Sir Michael Palliser
Cabinet Office

SECRETARIAT

Sir Robert Armstrong
Mr A D S Goodall
Mr R L L Facer
Brigadier J A C G Eyre

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SITUATION IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC

THE CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE STAFF reported on the military developments leading up to the surrender of the Argentine forces on the Falkland Islands, which had taken place at 2100 hours Falklands time on 14 June. The Argentine commander was understood to be still seeking instructions from Buenos Aires on a comprehensive ceasefire to include mainland forces. The most pressing problem was the handling of the Argentine prisoners of war, who were now expected to total about 15,000: the Argentines had food for only 3 days and very little tentage. Early action was also required to secure South Thule.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, congratulated the Chief of the Defence Staff, and through him the armed forces, on bringing the Falklands operation to a successful conclusion. Arrangements should be made to repatriate the bulk of the Argentine prisoners as quickly as possible using British ships, subject to confirmation by the Argentine Government that all hostilities between Argentina and the United Kingdom were at an end and that the safe conduct of the ships would be guaranteed. It was important that world opinion should be made aware of the scale of the problem, although not in terms which might suggest that the United Kingdom could not afford to keep the prisoners of war in the event of Argentina refusing a comprehensive cessation of hostilities. It should also be made clear that the United Kingdom's military objectives had been achieved with the repossession of the Falkland Islands; and that, given formal Argentine confirmation that hostilities were definitively over, the British Government's aim would be to return to normal relations with Argentina without delay: the 12 mile restriction zone on Argentine shipping would be lifted, as would British economic sanctions; and Britain's European Community partners and other allies would be asked to lift their sanctions at the same time. In order to encourage the Argentine Government to accept a comprehensive cessation of hostilities and to pre-empt unhelpful public statements by the Argentines, a message in broadly these terms should be transmitted to the Argentine Government through the Swiss authorities as quickly as possible (keeping the Brazilian authorities informed). It would be desirable to send a brief advance message through the Swiss giving notice that a constructive, detailed message would follow

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shortly. The substance of the detailed message should be incorporated in the statement which she would be making to Parliament that afternoon. It would be necessary in the same statement to announce that Mr Rex Hunt would be returning to the Islands forthwith, accompanied by Messrs Cheek and Luxton, the two Falkland Islands Councillors at present in the United Kingdom; that Mr Hunt would resume the civil responsibilities of Governor; but that on military matters he would accept direction from the Commander, Land Forces, Major General Moore. In effect Mr Hunt and General Moore would act as civil and military commissioners working in the closest co-operation with one another. An Order in Council would need to be laid quickly to give effect to these arrangements. Arrangements to admit a further contingent of journalists, including foreign journalists, to the Islands should be pursued in slower time: the immediate problems involved in the handling of prisoners of war and creating the conditions for a return to normal life in Port Stanley should take priority.

The Sub-Committee -

1. Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to arrange for messages to be transmitted urgently to the Argentine authorities, and for passages to be prepared for use in the Prime Minister's statement to Parliament that afternoon, in the terms indicated in the Prime Minister's summing up.
2. Invited the Attorney General, in consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, to arrange for an Order in Council to be prepared giving effect to the arrangements for administering the Falkland Islands described in the Prime Minister's summing up.
3. Invited the Defence Secretary, in consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, to proceed urgently with arrangements for repatriating the bulk of the Argentine prisoners of war on British ships, subject to the necessary assurances being received from the Argentine Government.
4. Invited the Defence Secretary, in consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, to make arrangements for a further contingent of selected journalists, including foreign journalists, to be transported to the Islands and given facilities there as soon as this was judged appropriate in the light of the situation in Port Stanley.

Cabinet Office

15 June 1982

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