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OD(SA)(82) 4th Meeting

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CABINET

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
SUNDAY 11 APRIL 1982 at 7.00 pm

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 Francis Pym MP
Secretary of State for
Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

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

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

Sir Antony Acland
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

SECRETARIAT

Sir Robert Armstrong
Mr R L Wade-Gery
Brigadier J A C G Eyre

SUBJECT

SITUATION IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC

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SITUATION IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC

Previous Reference: OD(SA)(82) 5rd Meeting

The Sub-Committee had before them a Note by the Ministry of Defence

and a letter of 11 April to the Private Secretary to the Prime Minister from the Private Secretary to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary on the prospective visit on 12 April by the United States Secretary of State, Mr Haig.

THE PRIME MINISTER summing up the discussion.

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The
idea of the Governor of the Falkland Islands joining the Task Force should not be pursued for the time being. The legal implications of a possible declaration of war by Argentina (which seemed unlikely in present circumstances) would need further consideration at a later meeting, as would the differing legal bases for British sovereignty over the various territories in the crisis area. Sovereignty over the Dependencies could prove to be of particular importance in relation to Antarctica and to future mineral discoveries. The Chief of the Defence Staff's advice was that

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Rules of Engagement for the Task Group would not need to be decided on for several more days. A full briefing on the military situation would be provided for the Sub-Committee by the Chiefs of Staff on 13 April. In the light of the request she had received from the Leader of the Opposition, she would arrange for Parliament to be recalled on 14 April. Meanwhile, she and the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Defence Secretary would meet Mr Haig on his return to London at 9.30 am on 12 April. They would arrange for the talks with him to go into recession during the course of the morning, so that the Sub-Committee could meet to consider whatever he might propose; and the talks with him could thereafter be resumed over luncheon, at which the Home Secretary would also be present. The essential elements in the Government's stance should continue to be that Argentine troops must be withdrawn before negotiations could take place and that thereafter the wishes of the islanders must remain paramount. If Mr Haig should press for the suspension of the Exclusion Zone, to give more time for his search for settlement, it might be possible to agree to that in return for the sort of counter-concessions set out in paragraph 4 of the letter of 11 April from the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's Private Secretary. But this could only be done for a limited period, while the Task Group was continuing its approach; it was notable that the Chilean Government had warned against the danger of Argentina playing for time. For the moment, at least, Britain's international position was a strong one. The Resolution of the United Nations Security Council had ordered the Argentines to withdraw. There had also been an admirably strong and united response from the other members of the European Community to Britain's call for economic measures against Argentina, as well as from a number of Commonwealth countries. The United States' attitude to economic measures seemed more equivocal; but it was not clear whether it would be appropriate to raise this subject with Mr Haig during his impending visit.

The Sub-Committee -

1. Endorsed the recommendations in paragraph 15 of OD(SA)(82) 6.
2. Invited the Secretary of State for Defence to review in due course the standing arrangements governing the state of readiness in which nuclear weapons were held by ships of the Royal Navy and aircraft of the Royal Air Force.

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3. Agreed that no arrangements should be made at the present juncture for the Governor of the Falkland Islands to join the British Task Group.
4. Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to circulate memoranda on the legal implications of a possible declaration of war by Argentina, and on the legal bases for Britain's title to sovereignty over the Falkland Islands, over South Georgia and over the South Sandwich Islands.
5. Agreed to resume their discussion at 10.30 am on 12 April, in order to consider any proposals which Mr Haig might by then have put forward.
6. Invited the Secretary of State for Defence to arrange for them to be given a full military briefing by the Chiefs of Staff at 11 am on 13 April.
7. Took note that the Prime Minister would arrange for Parliament to be recalled on 14 April.
8. Invited the Secretary of State for Defence to bring proposals before them on the Rules of Engagement for the British Task Group in good time before these were required.

Cabinet Office

12 April 1982

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