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ALQ 050/1

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Mr. Weston *MW 23/4*

CHIEFS OF STAFF MEETING: 23 APRIL

I attended the first of two Chiefs of Staff meetings at 0930 this morning. The following were the main points of interest.

(a) Intelligence Briefing. DCDSI reported on the two Boeing 707 sorties of which the first had flown over the Hermes group. He said that intelligence showed that the results of the sortie had taken about 3 1/4 hours to be relayed to the Argentine Fleet. The Chief of Naval Staff commented that the fact that the results of this surveillance were being passed so quickly to the fleet, and presumably also to Argentine submarines (though there is no evidence of that) emphasised how critical it was for the Rules of Engagement to be amended accordingly. /A draft minute from the Chief of Defence Staff to Mr. Nott had already been agreed on this subject./

DCDS(I) also reported that there was some evidence to show that construction work had started on Port Stanley airfield, but this was still in its early stages.

(b) The Advance Group. The Chief of Naval Staff reported that planning for the Advance Group of the Task Force had so far been based on the assumption that it would be held until the Main Carrier Battle Group could catch up with it. The Fleet Commander had however commented that the political situation appeared to have changed to a somewhat longer timescale, and had therefore recommended that the Advance Group should be instructed to turn back in order to catch up earlier with the Main Carrier Battle Group to allow both groups more time to "work up" together.

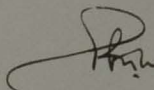
I said that I had strong doubts whether Ministers would wish movements of this sort to take place, which could well give the appearance of faltering. I received support from several members of the Committee who argued persuasively that although no journalists were embarked with the Advance Group, there must be a strong risk that any turn back would be spotted by the press and misinterpreted accordingly. I said that I thought that Ministers would need to be persuaded that the military advantages were critical before agreeing to something which could give a totally wrong impression. Mr. Pym (and Mr. Haig) would not want anything done which might relieve, or appear to relieve, the military pressure on Argentina. The CNS said that he had

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mentioned the point very briefly to the CDS this morning, but I doubt whether he will pursue the question in the light of this discussion. The operation, if agreed, would involve the Advance Group sailing northwards for two days.



(P.R.H. Wright)
23 April, 1982.

cc PS/PUS
Mr. Gillmore

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