

TO PRIME MINISTER FROM S/S DEFENCE

I heard this morning that you had discussed the Falklands Islands situation with the Foreign Secretary on your journey to Brussels. You asked for an urgent assessment of possible options for deployment of naval vessels to the Islands. I had already set contingency planning in hand over the weekend and a number of steps have been taken.

First is Endurance may be required to remain at South Georgia for the foreseeable future and will begin to run short of food and other supplies in three weeks. The RFA Fort Austin has sailed from Gibraltar to replenish Endurance. She will also be capable of providing support to other ships should they have to be sent to the area.

Secondly, I have today instructed that the nuclear submarine (SSN) HMS Spartan should be sailed covertly to the South Atlantic. She has been taken off exercises in the vicinity of Gibraltar and will proceed there to stock up with suitable weapons and provisions. She will sail from Gibraltar early on 31 March and should be in vicinity of the Falklands by 13 April. This is the quickest available means of deploying an SSN suitably equipped to the area. We are planning on the basis that a second SSN will be earmarked.

A further possibility will be to divert to the South Atlantic 7 destroyers/frigates currently participating in exercises off Gibraltar. They are due to leave for the UK on 1 April and their diversion would not become apparent before 5 April. There is time to take a decision on this later in the week. The ships could reach the Falklands in 2 - 3 weeks and could, if necessary, take on a Royal Marines Company Group (150 strong) who would be flown out to Ascension Island en route.

/This group

This group would not in itself constitute a viable full/task group. For this we would need at least a CVS, several escort vessels and a Royal Marines commando group (800 strong). Such a force could be assembled in about a week and would take a further three to reach the Falklands. It would, of course, become immediately apparent that we were putting together such a group.

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