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OD(SA)32nd 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
WEDNESDAY 12 MAY 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 Francis Pym MP
Secretary of State for Foreign
and Commonwealth Office

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

Mr R L Wade-Gery
Mr R L L Facer
Brig J A C G Eyre

SUBJECT

1. MILITARY ISSUES
2. DIPLOMATIC ISSUES

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1. MILITARY ISSUES

THE CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE STAFF briefed the Sub-Committee on the latest military situation.

In discussion it was noted that the position as regards the media remained unsatisfactory. Despite popular discontent with the attitude of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), much of the press now appeared to be ready to defend the Corporation against the Government; and the BBC themselves were of course well placed to mount a campaign against alleged attempts at censorship. The extreme shortage of photographic material from the South Atlantic meant that care should be taken to derive maximum advantage from the release of pictures, which were expected to be available soon, on the arrival of Argentine prisoners in Ascension Island and on the repossession of South Georgia.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that the handling of the media required further consideration. The debate in the House of Commons on 13 May would necessitate postponing until early on 14 May the proposed briefing on a landing. The rationalisation of existing Rules of Engagement should if possible be agreed between the Ministry of Defence, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Cabinet Office, below Ministerial level.

The Sub-Committee -

1. Instructed the Secretary of the Cabinet to arrange for early interdepartmental consideration of the proposals in OD(SA)(82) 46.
2. Invited the Defence Secretary to arrange for their proposed briefing on a landing in the Falklands to take place at 0800 on 14 May.

2. DIPLOMATIC ISSUES

The Sub-Committee had before them telegrams nos. 712-4 and 728-9 from the United Kingdom Mission in New York reporting on the current state of the negotiations in the United Nations.

THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said the overnight indications from New York were encouraging, though major difficulties remained. The British Representative, Sir Antony Parsons, would need urgent instructions on the following points -

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- a. The proposed draft language on
 - i. the past Resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly;
 - ii. nor prejudging the issue of sovereignty.
- b. Withdrawal distances.
- c. Interim administration post-1982.
- d. The role of the Executive and Legislative Councils in the interim administration.
- e. Immigration and property acquisition during the interim period.
- f. The Dependencies.

In discussion it was suggested that some trade-off might be possible between a British concession on the Dependencies and Argentine concessions on the interim administration. But military withdrawal from South Georgia would be both politically and militarily difficult for Britain to agree to; major compensating gains on other issues would therefore be needed if such withdrawal were to be contemplated. It might perhaps be possible to agree that the future of South Georgia should be settled separately; neither side was likely to be ready to continue hostilities for the sake of South Georgia alone. Some carefully worded limitation might need to be placed on the United Nations Administrator's power to alter existing laws. He should be obliged to consult the Executive and Legislative Councils. The United Nations flag would no doubt be flown but might be better not mentioned in any agreement. If no long term settlement had been reached the interim administration would need to continue after 1982, provided that the Security Council (where Britain and her allies held vetoes) had not voted to bring it to an end. Military withdrawal arrangements should be no worse than even-handed as between British and Argentine forces. The proposed language on not prejudging the sovereignty issue was a big advance on Argentina's earlier position but would still involve real political problems for Britain. The references to United Nations Resolutions were unwelcome but could probably be accepted as part of a package.

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THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that instructions to Sir Antony Parsons should now be drafted in the light of the Sub-Committee's views. Further consideration would also need to be given to the future administration of South Georgia; and to the possibility of any agreement being militarily guaranteed either by the United States or by a multinational force. Some form of guarantee seemed certain to be needed, since it would not be possible for Britain to repeat her present military deployments.

The Sub-Committee -

Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to prepare instructions for Sir Antony Parsons as indicated by the Prime Minister in her summing up.

Cabinet Office

11 May 1982

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