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23 APR 1982	

Mr Wright

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CHIEFS OF STAFF MEETING: 21 APRIL

1. I attended the Chiefs of Staff meeting today. CAS was in the chair. I am recording separately the discussion on operational options. Other points were:
 - a. the Argentine Task Group. The two Argentine task groups now afloat (believed to be about 200 miles south-west of Puerto Belgrano) had more auxiliary support than normal. On past practice, Argentine vessels did not tend to stay at sea for more than about 10 days. They might now have a capability for staying considerably longer. The sustainability of the Task Force would therefore depend critically on the serviceability of their equipment;
 - b. the Argentine auxiliary Buen Suceso. Stories were carried on the media overnight that the Argentine auxiliary Buen Suceso had run the blockade and had reached Port Stanley. This of course was not true. The vessel had been in Port Stanley since at least 11 April, although it may have made one or two quick and short sorties just outside the harbour. It was agreed that the MOD press line should give the lie to the latest rumours and make clear that the ship had for some time been in Port Stanley. This should not compromise intelligence sources;
 - c. Victor reconnaissance flights. The first Victor reconnaissance flight involving a multiple refuelling operation had taken place yesterday, 20 April. In operational terms it had been highly successful. It does not appear however that a large quantity of useful intelligence was derived, although the Victor on the final outward leg had picked up the presence of a fishing fleet (nationality unknown) whose presence had not been previously detected;
 - d. British arms sales to Argentina. There had been a number of critical articles in the press overnight about the level of British arms sales to Argentina in recent years. The Deputy Chief Press Representative in the MOD thought it was likely that he would be asked questions about this. He would make the point that although contracts had risen sharply in value terms over recent years many of the contracts have not yet been fulfilled and items not yet delivered were now covered by the embargo;

- e. Prisoners of War. I said that the latest paper on the handling of prisoners of war had reached us after the deadline for comments. Our Legal Advisers were looking at this paper urgently. We would let the MOD have our final comments as soon as possible in the course of the day (this has now been done). As regards the prisoners of war from South Georgia, it was thought that RRS Bransfield might be used. The CNS said that if a request for help over this was not accepted, we might have to consider requisitioning the vessel. I said that the Bransfield might, in any event, want to take off from South Georgia some of the BAS personnel and perhaps the two girl reporters. Depending on the number of POWs, there might be a problem of space on the ship;
- f. ROEs for blockade within the MEZ. This was raised by the CNS. A paper is now in draft in the MOD. This is likely to be put to the Chiefs on 22 April, the PUS's group on 23 April and to OD(SA) early next week. The CNS sounded a warning note; if a blockade was to be effective it would have to cover in some form or other the prevention of supply by merchant ship and by civil aircraft and the ROEs should deal with this without 'pussyfooting';
- g. Flow Chart. In a brief discussion of the latest flow chart, it was agreed that thought should be given to the inclusion of a timetable for decisions about an air zone over the Falklands. This would have to come into effect once the Task Force arrived in the MEZ (see paragraph f. above). Ministers also should be presented with the question of the possible bombing of the airfield at Stanley. In order to prevent resupply of the island garrison, this might have to be a fairly early option, provided of course that the Vulcan trials with conventional ammunition proved successful.

D H Gillmore

21 April 1982

cc:

PS/PUS
Mr Weston