

ODA(SA)(82) 29
25 April 1982

COPY NO

45

CABINET

DEFENCE AND OVERSEA POLICY (OFFICIAL) COMMITTEE

SUB-COMMITTEE ON THE SOUTH ATLANTIC AND THE
FALKLAND ISLANDS

FALKLAND ISLANDS: ASSISTANCE FOR ISLANDERS
WISHING TO LEAVE

Note by the Secretaries



1. The financial implications of evacuation from the Falkland Islands were examined in ODA(SA)(82) 27. The attached Note by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which has been agreed by Treasury, Home Office, and Ministry of Defence officials, deals with the question of issuing guidance to islanders wishing to leave; it is circulated for information.

2. The Secretary of the Cabinet has separately minuted Number 10, copying his minute to the Private Secretaries to the members of the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee, Sub-Committee on the South Atlantic and the Falkland Islands, seeking agreement to the early publication of a statement in the sense of a draft annexed to the attached note. Follow-up action will rest with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

3. The circulation of this document has been restricted, and recipients are accordingly asked to ensure that the need-to-know principle is strictly observed.

Signed C H O'D ALEXANDER
G R G MIDDLETON
S D SPIVEY

Cabinet Office
25 April 1982

FALKLAND ISLANDS : ASSISTANCE FOR ISLANDERS WISHING TO LEAVE

(Note by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office)

PROBLEM

1. The problem for decision is whether HMG should give some reassurance to those Islanders who may wish to leave temporarily.

PRESENT POSITION

2. Since the Argentine invasion, about 100 civilians have left the Falkland Islands. On 19 April, a group of 30 left by air for the Argentine and thence to Montevideo. Another group, of unknown size, is likely to leave by the same route on 22 April. Their means of travel is the regular Argentine passenger aircraft which has been flying between the Islands and Argentina once every two or three days. The Argentines appear to be content for people to leave on these flights.

3. It is difficult to establish how many people in the Falkland Islands wish to leave. The Chairman of the Falkland Islands Company (FIC), who has intermittent communication by telex with his Manager on the Islands, reports that the latter feels that the majority of the people wish to stay put for the present and watch how things go. All but a small number of the residents of Port Stanley have already left for the relative safety of 'the Camp'. There have, however, been reports that some Islanders are not unnaturally apprehensive about being involved in cross-fire, are looking to HMG for guidance on whether to stay or leave and are disappointed that HMG has not offered financial assistance for them to leave. While in present circumstances it will not be possible to obtain a clear view of the wishes of the majority, it seems clear that the Islanders' feelings of uncertainty will grow as the Task Force gets nearer.

/4.

4. The Foreign Secretary said in the House on 19 April that sympathetic consideration would be given to the temporary evacuation of those Islanders who wished to leave. But there are no ways in which we can ourselves arrange this, as we are dependent on the Argentine Airlines, and the Argentines have so far refused to allow the ICRC to visit the Islands. The help we can give is therefore limited to financial assistance. At present, undertakings to repay fares are being sought from those Islanders who reach Montevideo and need tickets back to the United Kingdom (quite a number have however been issued with tickets straight through to the UK by the FIC). In the case of people deported by the Argentines, however, we are not asking for the undertaking to be honoured. The financial implications of British Government support for an evacuation of the Islanders were assessed in paper ODO(SA)82 27. This concluded that if HMG decided on a mass evacuation, all those to be evacuated would expect the cost of their evacuation and eventual return would be met. The cost of such travel both ways is estimated to be in the region of £2 million.

5. If we were positively to encourage large numbers of the Islanders to leave (even if their departure was described as temporary for the period of the emergency), there would be a risk of undermining the Government's position that we are upholding the right to self-determination of a settled population. The Argentines, though for military reasons they might wish to retain as many hostages as possible, might equally try for political reasons to encourage the Islanders' departure and attempt to replace those who had left with Argentine nationals, thereby altering the complexion of the Islands' population. On the other hand, an expression of Government support for an evacuation might help convince the Argentines that our military preparations were in earnest.

6. We should also bear in mind that if the Government failed to respond to Islanders requests for assistance over evacuation and hostilities were to break out, there will be a risk of the Islanders suffering casualties. There is further consideration

/that a

that a prolonged blockade by the Task Force could have serious consequences for the supply of food and other essentials for the Islanders. Our present understanding is that while supplies may be adequate for a month or so, there are already some shortages. Finally, while the Argentine treatment of the Islanders has so far been correct, we cannot rule out the possibility that they may turn to more brutal methods once hostilities have begun.

7. In the above circumstances, the Government would be open to accusation of disregarding the Islanders, and in particular of failing to respond positively to earlier requests for assistance with evacuation.

8. If large numbers of Islanders sought to leave over a short period, they could only do so if the Argentines could be persuaded to lay on extra transport for this purpose. We should have to rely upon the ICRC or the Swiss Embassy in Buenos Aires to try to persuade the Argentines to do this.

9. A message of reassurance to the Islanders from HMG could be relayed by a number of means. The World Service of the BBC, the thrice weekly special Falkland Islands service run by the BBC's External Services, and the FIC's telex link.

CONCLUSIONS

10. (a) The point has now been reached where, unless clearer guidance is given to the Islanders by HMG, the Government could come under increasing criticism both from the Islanders themselves and from public opinion.

(b) It is not, however, in our interests to encourage a mass exodus from the Islands and there would be both practical as well as political difficulties if we were to do so. We need however to give the appropriate reassurance that the safety of the Islanders is a matter to which we attach importance and that any Islanders who want to leave, but are prevented from doing so by lack of means, will be given sympathetic help from HMG.

/(c)

CONFIDENTIAL

4

(c) With the Task Force approaching the Islands any such guidance will need to be given quickly, since the departure of large numbers from the Islands, once the Task Force is in position could well prove impracticable.

A suggested text of a message is annexed.

CONFIDENTIAL

ANNEX : TEXT OF MESSAGE

On 19 April the Foreign Secretary said in the House that sympathetic consideration would be given to the temporary evacuation of those Islanders who wished to leave. The Government continues to have this much in mind. We understand the natural apprehension of the Islanders in the present situation. There may be those of you who will wish to leave the Islands temporarily if the means to do so are available: others will wish to stay. It should however be made clear that any who wish to leave, but who might have difficulty in doing so because of lack of funds will find that their problems will be treated with the greatest sympathy by HMG.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL