

ALA 050/1

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Mr. Fearn

CHIEFS OF STAFF MEETING: 16 APRIL

then
Mr
Hulse

The following points of interest to the FCO arose at this morning's Chiefs of Staff meeting, which was attended by Mr. Nott:

(a) Intelligence Assessments. DCDSI reported that recent photographic analysis showed no signs of defensive positions being prepared on South Georgia. He referred to an unconfirmed report that the Argentine garrison were being lifted off the island.

DCDSI also referred to reports that the Argentines are trying to purchase military equipment from Italy, Germany, Austria and Israel and asked whether we would be prepared to take appropriate action with at least the first two governments concerned. I said that we certainly would, and that we would also be ready to take it up with the Austrians. I have asked Mr. Hulse to obtain the necessary basis for an instruction from the MOD.

The Chief of Naval Staff raised yesterday's JIC assessment, in which it was said that there were no Soviet submarines in the South Atlantic. Far from suggesting (as we had feared) that this should affect the Rules of Engagement, the Chief of Naval Staff argued that no one could be that categorical about the absence of Soviet submarines, and made some disparaging remarks about the amateurish basis of JIC assessments. I pointed out that the assessment had been fully cleared with the assessment side of the MOD, and again urged that the JIC should not be thought of as some outside body with no connection with government departments. (I later had a word with DCDSI about this.)

(b) Public Relations. In the course of a discussion of public relations, I reported the Secretary of State's hope that MOD briefing would do everything possible to cool the somewhat hysterical atmosphere of the press this morning, and that we should not appear to provoke the Argentines by creating a crisis atmosphere. Mr. Nott agreed with this and said that he would hope that we could maintain a low public relations posture over the next few days. I said that it was not of course our intention to suggest that the impression of firm resolve on the part of HMG should in any way be diminished. Mr. MacDonald said that MOD briefing had tried to play down the crisis atmosphere yesterday, and thought that it was a pity that No. 10 had played up the Prime Minister's decision not to go to Chequers. Mr. Fenn may wish to consider having a word with No. 10 about this.

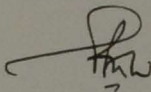
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In this context, Mr. Nott said that he hoped that the MOD could hold for a few days news of Vulcan bombing and flight refuelling exercises. He also opposed the idea of a Cooks tour for journalists round Ascension Island, on the ground that this could only be embarrassing for the Americans. I said that I was sure the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary would support this. The Chief of Defence Staff said that the decision to put an extra battalion on three days notice from this evening was likely to break over the weekend. Mr. Nott said that he would prefer no announcement today and Sir F. Cooper said that the MOD would try to agree a press line.

The Chief of Naval Staff pointed out that BBC TV was full of pictures and film of the Argentine Navy and very short on our own. The difficulties of correcting this were pointed out but Sir F. Cooper undertook to have a word with the BBC.



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

cc Private Secretary
PS/Mr. Onslow
PS/FUS
Sir I. Sinclair
Mr. Giffard
Mr. Ure
Mr. Fenn
Mr. Gillmore
Mr. Weston
Mr. Flower

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