

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

DEFENCE OPERATIONS EXECUTIVE

MINUTES of a Meeting held in Room 5301, Ministry of Defence, Main Building, Whitehall, on TUESDAY 30 MARCH 1982 at 5.00 pm

*M. H. ...*  
*Pl. check with SAMD*  
*10.30 am*  
*list of ...*  
*long time*  
*on Thursday*

*copy*  
*in file*  
*→ Mr. Evans*

ITEM 1. FALKLAND ISLANDS

1. Intelligence Briefing. The Argentinian party at Leith Harbour, South Georgia, was now estimated at 16 men. The British Antarctic Survey (BAS) Team at Grytviken numbered 22, and HMS ENDURANCE, with 21 Royal Marines on board, was currently lying off Grytviken. The Argentinian ship BAHIA PARAISO was patrolling off the coast with 2 helicopters, 2 landing craft and an unknown number of marines embarked. The BAHIA PARAISO was at present making no move to re-embark the shore party. Two type A69 Argentinian Corvettes were in the Falklands/South Georgia area, and believed to be tasked with intercepting ENDURANCE should she attempt to remove the Argentinian shore party. An Argentinian task force of 1 aircraft carrier, 4 destroyers and 1 LST was carrying out an exercise 8-900 miles north of the Falklands. Although similar exercises had been carried out on previous occasions, they would not normally take place until later in the year. It was not known what aircraft were embarked in the carrier, but with only 1 LST available, the amphibious lift capability was probably less than 1 Marine brigade. No change had been noted in Argentinian Air Force readiness and the Argentinian air service to Port Stanley was continuing normally.

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2. FCO Advice. The FCO representative said that the Foreign Secretary's statement to the House today had been firm but restrained. Whilst he had had no wish to stand in the way of the Argentinians fulfilling their contract to remove scrap metal from South Georgia, their presence must be properly authorised. Continuing, the FCO advised that there was an indication that the Argentinians planned to occupy at least one island in the Falklands sometime in April. In the present circumstances the military response most favoured by the FCO was to send one or more SSNs.

3. Military Options. The DOE was under remit to consider the military advice to be offered by the Acting Chief of the Defence Staff to the Secretary of State for use at the forthcoming meeting of OD. The Executive examined a wide range of possible options and, following discussion, the Secretary was instructed to prepare a draft submission (1) reflecting the agreed advice of the members of the Executive for their approval out of committee by 10.30 am on 31 March 1982.

Note:

1. Draft Submission (attached) (5 pages).

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ATTACHMENT TO  
MINUTES OF  
DOE 1ST MEETING/82  
30 MARCH 1982

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SECRETARY OF STATE

FALKLAND ISLANDS

1. The military options for defending the Falkland Islands and Dependencies were detailed in the Note circulated by your office on 26 March. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and Minister (AF), in their minute of 30 March, reported on the actions already taken or contemplated in response to the situation in South Georgia. Before the meeting of OD tomorrow you may like a note of my views on where we now stand and the possibilities for further action.
2. The action we have already taken is significant:
  - a. HMS ENDURANCE has been on station at South Georgia since 24 March with an enhanced platoon of 21 Royal Marines;

- b. The Royal Marine garrison at Port Stanley has been doubled (strength 70) by delaying the return of the outgoing garrison since 29 March;
- c. RFA FORT AUSTIN, a RN stores support ship, left Gibraltar on 29 March and will rendezvous with HMS ENDURANCE on 12 April to enable ENDURANCE to remain on station for a further two months;
- d. A nuclear powered submarine (SSN) HMS SPARTAN will sail from Gibraltar for the South Atlantic on 31 March to arrive by 13 April;
- e. A second SSN, HMS SPLENDID, will sail from the UK at the end of this week to arrive about 18 April.

#### SSN Deployments

3. The SSN deployments clearly have several advantages. They can be undertaken covertly without prejudice to the continuance of the diplomatic dialogue with the Argentine. In addition to their capability against submarines, they have a good anti-surface ship capability each armed with sufficient torpedoes to sink about 4 ships. Once we have declared their presence in the South Atlantic, they would become a powerful deterrent to any attack on HMS ENDURANCE or to a seaborne invasion of any of the islands, even though they could not directly prevent any Argentine military option identified in the JIC assessment (1). They could exact a heavy retribution on the Argentine Navy in either event. Two SSNs ensure the operational availability of 1, and 2 operational SSNs are highly desirable in order to cover the approaches both to the Falkland Islands and South Georgia.

Note:

1. JIC (81)(N)34 dated 9 July 1981.

4 Since there are only 6 or 7 SSNs available at any one time, we must accept certain operational penalties as a result of the deployment of 2 SSNs to the South Atlantic. SSNs have a crucial role both in the conduct of anti-Soviet intelligence gathering tasks, which are important for our intelligence relationship with the United States, and in safeguarding the deployment of our strategic deterrent.

5. The deployment of a third SSN would considerably exacerbate the operational penalties, although it would obviously increase our ability to exact retribution against the Argentine Navy, and enable us to cover a wider area. I doubt, however, that it is essential for the purposes of deterrence and I therefore do not recommend that a third SSN should be deployed for the present.

#### Destroyer/Frigate Deployment

6. Unlike the SSN option, the deployment of surface ships is difficult to conceal and therefore likely to be provocative. Additionally, there would be no purpose in, and considerable risks associated with, a deployment of surface ships without suitable air cover which could only be provided from a carrier. Moreover, the deployment of a small force would leave the initiative with the Argentinians who, once they had news of our deployment, could increase their presence up to the limit of their naval forces, and perhaps take pre-emptive action by invading the Falkland Islands. This militates against the deployment of a small surface force, such as some of the destroyers and frigates now exercising off Gibraltar, and I therefore do not recommend this option.

A1 Reinforcement

7. The FCO have advised that it is most unlikely that any airfields in South America would be available to us for military operations. In these circumstances there is no means of reinforcing the Falkland Islands garrison against an invasion threat other than by sea.

Task Group Deployment

8. If we are to counter the Argentine military options outlined in the JIC assessment, we would need to deploy surface ships, including a carrier with a Commando Group and Sea Harriers embarked. There is, however, the real danger of such a force arriving too late to deter an Argentine invasion, given a passage by sea of 3 weeks and a week's preparation beforehand. If it is anticipated that further troops, additional to the present garrison, will be required I recommend the deployment of a force sufficient to deal with whatever situation it found on its arrival. Such a force is judged to be a full Commando Group (800 men) with its integral logistic and transport support.

Penalties

9. Whichever of the above options are pursued, it goes without saying that, if a presence has to be maintained in the Falklands area for a prolonged period, it would make enormous demands on our resources - up to 3 or 4 times the number of units actually deployed - due to the distance from the UK. This would have a very serious effect on our ability to meet our other commitments worldwide and incur substantial extra operating costs.

Weather and Mobility

10. There are two other factors which will affect our ability effectively to reinforce the Falkland Islands during the southern winter. The first is the weather which is predominantly adverse characterised by high winds, frequent fog and persistent heavy cloud. In the case of South Georgia these conditions are compounded by freezing temperatures and the presence of icebergs which make navigation hazardous for ships which are not ice strengthened. The second is the difficulty of moving from one island to another in the Falklands group.

Longer Term Proposals

11. [Given the limitations and costs of military options I would urge that the FCO should give urgent consideration <sup>to the options of a political solution</sup> to non-military sanctions which might be taken against Argentine interests in this country.]

12. For the longer term we are urgently considering the minimum improvements necessary to Port Stanley airfield and aviation fuelling facilities to enable limited air reinforcements to be carried out. Another option we are considering for the longer term is the provision of patrol craft to give the garrison more flexibility in their operations.

31st March 1982

ACTING CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE STAFF