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PRIME MINISTER

The Falkland Isles

A note by the Ministry of Defence on the military options that seem likely to be open to us has been sent to you by the Secretary of State.

2. The first moment at which any such option becomes available is when the first SSN arrives in the area; that is scheduled for Sunday, 11th April. Instructions will need to be given to it as to what it should do.

3. It will also be necessary to decide whether the task force should proceed at the pace of the slowest vessels, in which case it would not reach the area until the first week in May; or whether the faster warships should proceed more rapidly, leaving the slower vessels - mainly those carrying the Marines and landing equipment - to arrive later. In that case the first ships could be on station in the area by about 24th April.

4. What military options are then open will depend on the disposition of Argentine forces and on logistic and other operational conditions. What options are chosen will depend upon the strategic and political objectives, both short and long term. The logistic difficulties of keeping so large a task force supplied will increase, the longer the force is on station; and weather conditions in the area will deteriorate in the Antarctic winter months of June, July and August. Our international political position may weaken with the passage of time and deteriorate when we take military action.

5. It would be a help in narrowing and refining the military options if the South Atlantic Sub-Committee could define the strategic and political objectives, by giving the answers to various questions which are set out below. I recognise that the questions may not be capable, at any rate at this stage, of "black and white" answers, because the situation can and no doubt will change in the time between now and the time when the task force arrives on station; but it would nonetheless be useful to have some preliminary indications of Ministerial thinking.

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6. Ministers will wish to be as clear as possible about the relation between their immediate and longer term strategic objectives.

7. In the short term, I take it that the strategic objectives are:-

- (a) to maximise diplomatic and other pressures on the Argentines for the departure of the Argentinian authorities and troops now occupying the Falkland Isles and their dependencies, and the restoration of British Administration;
- (b) to put ourselves in the best political and military position to use military force should this be necessary for the purpose.

8. To help in the process of refining military options a number of questions need to be considered:-

- (a) Are Ministers prepared to contemplate attacks on the Argentine mainland?

There might be good military arguments for seeking to take out military targets - e.g. sinking ships in harbour (or close inshore) and attacking aircraft on the ground, destroying oil installations; but this could well involve us in formally acknowledging the existence of a state of war between the United Kingdom and Argentina, with all the consequences which would follow from that; and attacks on the mainland might tilt otherwise friendly international opinion, and countries whose logistic support will be valuable, against us.

- (b) Is it a political objective to minimise casualties, on the Argentine side as well as on the British side?

- (c) Are Ministers prepared to contemplate significant loss of life among the Falklanders either in an attack or in penal action by the Argentine garrisons?

If the islands are strongly garrisoned, and if the Islanders are allowed to remain (or prevented from leaving, so that in effect they are hostages), such an objective could make it difficult to contemplate an assault landing in a populated part of the Falklands.

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- (d) Should we or, say, the Swiss seek permission to evacuate the Falklanders?
- (e) How crucial will be the effect on this country of world opinion, particularly the United States, our EEC partners, and at the United Nations?
- (f) What political importance do Ministers attach to the timing and sequence of any military operations? Are they prepared to see a significant interval between, say, individual SSN operations and main task force operations?
- (g) During the period when the SSNs are on station ahead of the main force, should they be confined to a reconnaissance role; should they be authorised to attack Argentinian naval (and, if so, within an announced area or wherever they may be?)

There will be an interval of nearly a fortnight between the arrival (we hope secret) on station of the first SSN and the arrival, inevitably public, of the task force. If early in that period the SSN were to sink an Argentine warship, that could have military advantages, and would be seen as a success by domestic public opinion. On the other hand it could lead to reprisals against the Falkland Islanders; and it could turn international opinion against us, leading to resolutions in the Security Council (which we should have to veto) calling upon us not to use force, and possibly to the withdrawal of logistic support by some of those countries now providing it. These consequences could have implications for the use of the task force even before it arrived on station.

- (h) Is it desirable to concentrate on the main Falkland Isles, or would it be sensible to recover South Georgia first? South Georgia, 800 miles to the South East of the Falklands themselves and out of range for Argentinian Air Force aircraft, could be taken by a detachment from the task force on its way to the main islands: a party of Marines could be landed, South

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Georgia reclaimed for the Crown, and the small Argentinian garrison now on the island cut off from the Argentine mainland and beaten or blockaded into surrender. There could be political attractions about proceeding to retake South Georgia en route in this way.

- (j) If it were decided in effect to seal off the Falkland Isles when the main force had arrived (e.g. by issuing a warning that any ship entering an area within, say, 200 miles of the Falkland Isles would be required to turn back) would the Royal Navy be empowered if necessary to fire upon:-
  - (i) Argentine naval vessels?
  - (ii) Argentine merchant vessels?
  - (iii) Vessels of other nationalities?

Once the British task force has arrived on station, the Argentine Navy might well withdraw to its harbours, and the Argentines might seek to use merchant vessels, of their own or of friendly South American countries, to maintain supplies to the garrison on the Falklands.

- (k) Similar questions could arise in relation to Argentine (or other) air transport (military or civil) to the Falkland Isles.
- (l) Sealing off the Falklands could create considerable hardships for the Islanders (which the Argentinians would no doubt seek to maximise): is that a politically acceptable contingency?
- (m) *Passage deleted and retained under Section 3(4).*

*@Wayland, 11 September 2012*

- 9. For the longer term:
  - (a) Do Ministers wish to address now what our objectives should be?
  - (b) Is a return to the old status quo achievable and desirable? If so, are we prepared to sustain it in terms of forces required, logistic support of the Islands as a whole, and cash?

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10. I am sending copies of this minute to the Home Secretary, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Secretary of State for Defence and the Paymaster General (the members of the Sub-Committee on the South Atlantic and the Falkland Islands).

RA

Robert Armstrong

6th April 1982

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