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PRIME MINISTERCabinet: Falklands

It would be convenient for the Cabinet discussion tomorrow to focus first on diplomatic and political issues and then on military prospects.

2. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary could report on the diplomatic situation and on preparations for the Parliamentary debate. He should cover:

- (a) The breakdown of negotiations in New York, as announced there (we hope) late this evening London time.
- (b) Plans to table in Parliament at noon tomorrow the British draft agreement, now rejected and therefore withdrawn, and the proposed commentary thereon.
- (c) What Argentine document(s) will have been published by the time of the debate in Parliament.
- (d) Prospects for action in the Security Council.
- (e) Any unforeseen New York or other developments overnight.
- (f) American and European attitudes.
- (g) Plans for the debate in Parliament.

3. Initially you will need to handle military prospects yourself, keeping the Secretary of State for Defence in reserve for answering (or parrying) questions. The Cabinet have come a long way since their initial wish to be consulted before a landing was authorised. Yesterday, I gather, most members seemed glad not to be in the full military picture. This suggests that you should not tell them tomorrow that the landing is expected tomorrow night or as soon thereafter as local conditions allow. To do so would burden them with too much secret knowledge, not only during the debate in Parliament but also perhaps (if the weather is bad) for some days to come; and it would run counter to the Secretary of State for Defence's wish to fluff in public, at any rate initially, the fact that the landing is D-Day rather than another Pebble Island raid.

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4. But you can hardly say nothing at all about OD(SA)'s decision to authorise the landing, without later seeming to have been unjustifiably disingenuous.

5. I therefore recommend a middle course. You could say that Pebble Island illustrates our policy of steadily tightening the military screw. With the arrival of the amphibious force on station, a full-scale landing in due course is now practicable; and, given the breakdown of negotiations in New York, the Force Commander's instructions extend to a full-scale landing when the time is right. He now has OD(SA)'s authority to proceed as his military judgment and local conditions (including weather) dictate. There could be more Pebble Islands, followed by a permanent landing later; or a permanent landing more immediately.

6. Against this background you could suggest that the Cabinet should not ask probing questions about what is expected to happen when. But the Secretary of State for Defence, as appropriate, could answer more general questions about the general strategy; e.g. worries about the air threat or the submarine threat or the danger to Falklander lives or the handling of the media. There may also be questions to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary about international reactions as fighting escalates; or about the chances of further negotiations starting before it does.



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19th May, 1982

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