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Prime Minister
You may wish to think about
this well before the briefing
on Thursday.

PRIME MINISTER

A.J.C. 11/5.

The Falkland Islands

The military briefing on the landing option is to take place on Thursday, 13th May 1982 at 5.00 pm in the Cabinet Office Briefing Room.

2. It will of course be important to have the tactical intelligence which should then be available about the numbers, state and disposition of the Argentine defence forces on the Islands. But it is not only a matter of tactical intelligence: there will remain a number of major questions to which Ministers will need and should seek answers before deciding whether to commit British forces to a landing, if the attempts to negotiate a ceasefire and mutual withdrawal break down. Clearly the assessment of the prospects for a landing could have a bearing upon the conduct of attempts to negotiate a ceasefire and withdrawal agreement.

3. First, what would be the objective of a landing? The Chiefs of Staff have several times insisted that the task of the Task Force has been and still is to conduct operations "with a view to re-possession" of the Islands, not to repossess them. Does that mean that, if the objective is to repossess the Islands, the Force Commander needs more resources at his disposal? Intelligence now suggests that there are some 12,000 Argentinians on the Islands (of whom 9,500 are soldiers and the other 2,500 are marines, sailors and airmen). Once 5 Brigade arrives, we should have some 8,000 to 8,500. There will thus be, on paper, a numerical superiority for the Argentines. That may be offset to some degree by the fact that many of the Argentines are young conscripts, whereas all our people will be professional soldiers, and possibly by poor morale among the Argentine troops. But the questions to the Chiefs of Staff must be:

- (i) If they were given the task of repossessing the Islands, do they assess that they would have a reasonable chance of success with an acceptable level of casualties with the forces already at their disposal?

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- (ii) If the answer to that question is no:
 - (a) What further forces would they need in order to ensure a reasonable chance of success?
 - (b) Could those forces be found? If so, from where, and at what cost in terms of diversion from other tasks? Could those forces be deployed to the Falkland Islands? When could they get there? Could they be adequately supplied?

4. This is not just a matter of men and equipment, but also - and crucially - of air power. Once on the Islands, the landing force would be within range of land-based Argentine air attack. The roles would then be reversed: we have been bombing and shelling the Argentine garrison, but then the Argentines would be seeking to bomb and shell our landing force. The Argentines have on paper a larger number of aircraft at their disposal than we have, though they may not all be as serviceable or as effectively operated as ours. If we could not secure and maintain air superiority over the landing force, there would be a risk of heavy casualties and losses of equipment from air attack, which would be politically damaging at home and could prejudice the success of the operation. So another set of questions to the Chiefs of Staff - an important sub-group of the first set - should be:-

- (i) Do they assess that, with the air and anti-aircraft power available to the Task force, we have a reasonable chance of securing and maintaining air superiority over the Argentines during a landing on the Falkland Islands.
- (ii) If not, what reinforcements would be required, could those reinforcements be found, and how, by when and where could they be deployed?
- (iii) Would the maintenance of air superiority over the Falkland Islands require and depend upon operations against Argentine mainland air bases? There is of course a political dimension to that question, but there is also a military dimension: is there any form of attack on mainland bases which would promise

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such a high degree of effectiveness to justify the political as well as the military risks? There appear to be three possible forms of attack:

- (1) Vulcan bombers from Ascension.
- (2) Sea Harriers from the Task Force.
- (3) Special forces.

Vulcan bombers can be deployed only one at a time, and at great cost in terms of flight refuelling demands; experience with Port Stanley airfield does not suggest that much more sophisticated airfields could easily be put out of action this way. The use of Sea Harriers would surely be a risky diversion and exposure of aircraft whose primary task ought to be the maintenance of air cover over the Falkland Islands.

*Passage deleted and retained under
Section 3(4) O'Wayland, 10 May 2012*

There is one other obvious question about the landing. How dangerous will it be if there are still Argentine submarines at large? Could we for example lose Canberra?

5. There is also a further set of questions to be asked about the impact of a landing on the lives and property of the Falkland Islanders:

- (i) If the Task Force were required to minimise casualties to the Falkland Islanders, would that inhibit operations and prejudice success?
- (ii) If the Task Force were required to avoid damage to property of the Falkland Islanders, would that inhibit operations and prejudice success? In particular, if Port Stanley had to be assaulted, could that be done without unacceptable damage to the buildings there?

6. In my judgment these are questions which should be put specifically to the Chief of the General Staff, as well as to the Chief of the Defence Staff.



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7. These are all questions about the landing and repossession of the Falkland Islands. There is a further set of questions to be put to the Ministry of Defence about the aftermath of a successful landing. Once repossessed, the Falkland Islands would have to be garrisoned and protected against renewed Argentine attack, by sea or air, unless and until it was possible to reach a definitive settlement which removed the threat of such an attack or relieved us of the obligation of protecting the Islands against it. What forces should we have to maintain in the South Atlantic for this purpose? And at what cost, in terms of diversion from other tasks, impairment of our contribution to NATO, and financial burden on the defence budget?

8. There is a yet further set of questions, to which Ministers will need to address themselves during the next few days, about the long-term objective. You and your colleagues in OD(SA) agree that British public opinion would not accept that our forces should be put to all the effort and risks involved in a repossession, if thereafter the Falkland Islands were simply handed over to Argentine sovereignty. You yourself reject the notion of such sovereignty in any circumstances: but I think you also believe that it will not be possible for us simply to revert to the status quo ante of colonial status. You therefore consider it necessary to think in terms of United Nations administration or some similar arrangement that could lead to eventual independence and to the repopulation and development of the islands.

9. So far as we know, the Argentine objectives are to prevent the restoration of British colonial administration of the Falkland Islands and sooner or later to secure Argentine sovereignty over them. They may be prepared to put the achievement of sovereignty into suspense for an interim period, and perhaps for longer than that, if they are either assured of ultimate sovereignty or believe that they can see their way to securing it either by diplomacy or renewed force. There may be an element of trade-off between the two objectives. But it seems inconceivable that the present Junta or any other conceivable successor government in Buenos Aires will ever positively and formally renounce or abandon the claim to sovereignty over the Falkland Islands.



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10. In parenthesis, the dependencies may be different. The Argentine claim to South Georgia is relatively recent, our title to it strong. It probably does not matter to them politically as much as the Falkland Islands do. They might be prepared to contemplate a deal whereby they kept South Sandwich and we kept South Georgia. Ought the implications of such a deal to be explored? Should we ask for a full assessment of the strategic and economic case for retaining South Georgia? And for a similar assessment of the strategic and economic disadvantages of abandoning our claim to South Sandwich?

11. It seems to me that in the end no definitive settlement is possible in which the Argentine Government is not prepared at least to acquiesce. This is for two reasons:-

- (a) The United Nations, where (as you saw from your Venezuelan visitor) there will be a majority of countries who sympathise with the Argentine claim for sovereignty over the Falkland Islands, will not agree, and would not be able, to impose a settlement in which Argentina was not prepared to acquiesce.
- (b) The future of the Falkland Islands as an independent territory will depend upon their status as an independent country being acceptable to the international community (and specifically to the United Nations) and upon their economic development. The two are interrelated. Investment is unlikely to be attracted there so long as there is political uncertainty (by which is meant essentially the threat of Argentine occupation because of failure to achieve a settlement in which Argentina is prepared to acquiesce).

12. At this stage of events the Argentine Government is very unlikely to acquiesce in an "independence" outcome for negotiations; the most they may be perhaps expected to accept is that the negotiations should be without any preconditions or prejudice on the question of sovereignty. Hence no doubt Sir Anthony Parsons's view that, the less we proclaim United Nations trusteeship or independence as our objective in the negotiations, the more likely we are to



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get a ceasefire and withdrawal agreement now. That of course has the consequence of leaving the question open for subsequent argument in the negotiations. But if the points in paragraph 11 above are valid, the question is inescapable in those negotiations, whether the negotiations follow a ceasefire and withdrawal agreement now or a successful military repossession of the Falkland Islands, because the facts of geography (and the unreliability of United States support on a long-term basis) give Argentina an inescapable voice on the future of the Islands.

13. For these reasons I do not believe that it is possible for us at this stage to guarantee an outcome which is consistent with the long-term objective of independence. What we have to do at the moment is to put ourselves into a position where we can conduct negotiations for a definitive settlement, which will inevitably have to involve the Argentines. We can be in that position as a result of a ceasefire and withdrawal agreement now; or failing that we can aim to be in that position as a result of a successful repossession of the Falkland Islands. What could be the worst possible outcome, in military and political terms, and leave us in the worst position to achieve our objectives in long-term negotiations, would be so to play the hand as plausibly to be held responsible for the failure of diplomatic efforts to get a ceasefire and withdrawal agreement now and then not to be able to repossess the Falkland Islands: to end up either in a stalemate with continuing attrition and casualties ("Gallipoli") or in a withdrawal. And that is why the briefing about a landing, and the questions to the Chiefs of Staff about the prospects of a successful landing and repossession, are crucial not only militarily but also politically.

Robert Armstrong

11th May 1982

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