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OD(SA)(82) 27th Meeting

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CABINET

DEFENCE AND OVERSEA POLICY COMMITTEE

SUB-COMMITTEE ON THE SOUTH ATLANTIC AND
THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

MINUTES of a Meeting held at
10 Downing Street on
THURSDAY 6 MAY 1982 at 9.00 am

PRESENT

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon William Whitelaw MP
Secretary of State for the
Home Department

The Rt Hon Francis Pym MP
Secretary of State for Foreign
and Commonwealth Affairs

The Rt Hon Cecil Parkinson MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
and Paymaster General

THE FOLLOWING WERE ALSO PRESENT

The Rt Hon Sir Michael Havers QC MP
Attorney General

Admiral of the Fleet
Sir Terence Lewin
Chief of the Defence Staff

Sir Antony Acland
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Sir Frank Cooper
Ministry of Defence

Sir Michael Palliser
Cabinet Office

SECRETARIAT

Sir Robert Armstrong
Mr R L Wade-Gery
Mr R L L Facer
Brigadier J A C G Eyre

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1. MILITARY ISSUES

The Sub-Committee had before them a minute of 5 May to the Prime Minister from the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, about the position of the Argentine aircraft carrier.

THE CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE STAFF briefed the Sub-Committee on the latest military situation.

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL said that the legal defensibility of an attack on the Argentine aircraft carrier would be reduced if she were not within 12 hours' steaming of a point from which her aircraft could threaten British forces.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that the Argentine aircraft carrier should not be attacked if north of latitude 44° South and west of a line parallel to the Argentine coast at a distance of perhaps 50 or 100 nautical miles; the exact distance should be decided by the Ministry of Defence in consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and in the light of the potential threat to British supply lines. The United States Secretary of State, Mr Haig, should be informed of this decision. Mr Haig should also have his attention drawn to certain sensitive intelligence items in British and American hands which made clear how ruthless and disingenuous the Argentines were being in relation to military operations. She herself might similarly draw President Reagan's attention to these items. Action should also be taken to counter inaccurate allegations by the media that British forces had no means of defence against Argentine missile attacks of the kind which had destroyed HMS Sheffield.

The Sub-Committee -

1. Invited the Defence Secretary to arrange for British forces to be instructed not to attack the Argentine aircraft carrier within the area indicated by the Prime Minister in her summing up.
2. Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to inform Mr Haig of this decision and to draw his attention to the intelligence items referred to by the Prime Minister in her summing up.
3. Invited the Defence Secretary to consider how best to counter public misrepresentation of the British Task Force's air defence capability.

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2. DIPLOMATIC ISSUES

The Sub-Committee had before them telegrams from Her Majesty's Ambassador in Washington (nos. 1611, 1615-6, 1619 and 1629) and from the British Permanent Representative at the United Nations (nos. 632 and 658-60) about the current proposals for a settlement put forward by the United States in consultation with Peru and by the United Nations Secretary General, Senor Perez de Cuellar.

THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said that the United States Secretary of State, Mr Haig, had accepted the amendments to his draft agreement which had been put forward by Britain following the Cabinet's discussion the previous day. Mr Haig had now transmitted the amended draft to the Peruvians, with a request for their acceptance by 5 pm London time on 6 May, but was not encouraged by their initial response. Argentina seemed now to want United Nations involvement and was alleged to have responded positively to Senor Perez de Cuellar's proposals. These were little more than a framework and appeared compatible with Mr Haig's proposals. There might therefore be tactical advantage in Britain also responding positively. Further consultation would be needed with both Mr Haig and Senor Perez de Cuellar. Nothing should be done to reduce the chances of Mr Haig's proposals being accepted.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that Mr Haig and Senor Perez de Cuellar should be further consulted before she herself had to answer further questions in Parliament that afternoon. It would be necessary to consider at what point either the American or the United Nations proposals should be made public, in full or in summary. Attention should also be given to the physical problem of arranging for the withdrawal of Argentine troops following the conclusion of an agreement; help might need to be sought from neutral countries or from the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The Sub-Committee -

1. Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to consult Mr Haig and Senor Perez de Cuellar further as indicated by the Prime Minister in her summing up and thereafter to advise the Prime Minister on the line to be taken in Parliament on the United Nations proposals.
2. Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to give further thought to ways in which an agreed withdrawal of Argentine troops could be carried out.

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