

Ref: B06473

PRIME MINISTER

c Sir Robert Armstrong

Falklands: Military Briefing for OD(SA)

Tomorrow's meeting at 0900 in the Cabinet Office Briefing Room will be attended by the normal OD(SA) complement plus a team from the Ministry of Defence (the three Service Chiefs of Staff, six briefers, General Glover from the Intelligence side and Sir Frank Cooper). It will not formally be a meeting of the Sub-Committee as such. But you can readily decide to turn it into one, if decisions are sought by the Defence Secretary in the light of the briefing (as may happen, see below). If so, it might be best at that point to adjourn to the Cabinet Room, partly so as to be conveniently placed for the subsequent meeting of the Cabinet and partly so as to shed tactfully the team of MOD extras. In that case the Chief of the Defence Staff would of course adjourn with you, as a regular OD(SA) invitee; but not the three Service Chiefs.

2. The military briefing will cover the following main possibilities for the future.

a. Full enforcement of the Exclusion Zone round the Falkland Islands, against aircraft as well as ships and against commercial as well as military traffic. Possible from 29th April.  
How effective? How sustainable?

b. Use of shore-based aircraft, eg

- Vulcans from Ascension against Stanley airfield;
- Victors from Ascension for reconnaissance;
- Nimrods from Ascension, for reconnaissance, if in-flight refuelling can be arranged;

*Passage deleted and retained under Section 3(x).*

*Wayland, 3 May 2012*

c. Use of Special Forces, ie SAS and their naval counterparts. Parties could be landed on the Falklands, either by helicopter from the Task Force (when in range) or by parachute from an

aircraft from Ascension. They could gather intelligence and/or take harassing action of various kinds.

d. Submarine operations outside the MEZ, ie against the Argentine fleet.

e. Landing options in the Falklands. State of the opposition. Optimum date. Outside range of dates.

3. Carrier-based action against Stanley airfield is also likely to be included.

4. After the presentation and questions, the Defence Secretary may outline a timetable for decision-taking and may also seek immediate decisions from the Sub-Committee on four issues.

i. Should the Amphibious Group sail from Ascension on 23rd April, in order to be off the Falklands by 7th May? Or should it wait until 29th April for the arrival of the stragglers (Intrepid, the parachute battalion and the reinforcement Harriers) and thus not arrive off the Falklands until mid-May?

ii. Should Special Forces be para-dropped from Ascension? This would be possible from 25th April.

*Passage deleted and retained under  
Section 3(4).*

*AWayland  
3 May 2012*

iv. Should Vulcans ~~be~~ sent to Ascension over the weekend, so that they would be available there if a decision were taken early next week to use them against Stanley airfield (which would then be possible on 27th April)?



5. Of these decisions only i. is really urgent. Leaving the others until next Monday (26th April) would have only a marginal effect on the operations involved. The Sub-Committee may well not wish to be rushed on such sensitive issues, which will only just have been exposed to them. Major decisions should no doubt be avoided in the absence of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, who returns on Saturday (24th April).

6. On decision i. the consensus below Ministerial level is that the Amphibious Group should sail from Ascension as soon as possible, ie on 23rd April. This will increase military options. Unless they were slowed down (which would be possible at any stage) they would be available for a landing on the Falklands from 7th May, if by then it is clear that the operation can be safely undertaken without the reinforcements (parachute battalion etc) which would not arrive until mid-May. Sailing on 23rd April would also avoid the public relations problem of explaining why they are hanging about, and the danger that we might be asked for diplomatic reasons not to sail them at all. The only disadvantage is that, if they did in the event have to wait at sea in the Falkland area until a landing was made in mid-May after the reinforcements had arrived, they would be a week less fresh than if they had waited.

7. Finally, the Sub-Committee should decide on its next meeting, after the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's return. Monday morning, (26th April) might be kinder to him than Sunday, unless the course of events in the meantime makes a weekend meeting (perhaps at Chequers) essential.

*RLW*

21st April 1982

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