

Ref. A08322

PRIME MINISTER

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I understand that the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary may be sending you and other colleagues in OD(SA) a minute about the Argentine aircraft carrier. He accepts that, if the fighting went on, it would be very important to try to take it out; but he thinks that, if we were to attack it while the new initiative was alive, we really should lose a great deal of international support; and above all we should greatly upset the Americans and risk losing their support.

2. I believe that the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary is not the only member of OD(SA) to have this view, and that the Home Secretary and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster may well share it. Twice during the course of today the Attorney General has said that, while the aircraft carrier is in or very close to Argentine territorial waters and is sailing North, it becomes more difficult to justify an attack.

3. As you know, we also have intelligence that its attack capability is currently limited to six aircraft with a radius of 200 miles.

4. Obviously if it were to change course in a direction which seemed to threaten an attack on the task force, the submarine ought to be free to attack. But there would be something to be said for making sure that the aircraft carrier was not attacked except in those circumstances, at any rate until we know whether the Argentinians are going to accept the ceasefire proposals or not.

HANDLING

5. You will presumably want to discuss this at OD(SA) tomorrow morning. The Secretary of State for Defence will not be there, because he is in Brussels; but Sir Frank Cooper will be there, with the Chief of the Naval Staff, and he will no doubt be able to report his Secretary of State's views.

5th May, 1982

REA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

SECRET AND PERSONAL