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Mr. Fern

CHIEFS OF STAFF MEETING: 26 APRIL

The following points of interest arose at this morning's Chiefs of Staff meeting at which Mr. Nott was present.

(a) Intelligence Assessment. DCDSI reported that there were approximately 150 Argentinians on South Georgia (see later discussion about prisoners). Having described the deployment of the Argentine fleet, he said that there was no present indication of any intention on the part of the Argentinians to take early offensive action. They were however using both fishing vessels and merchant shipping in the area, both of which could be used as a bait to get us to take military action.

DCDSI also reported on Port Stanley airfield, and referred to a debriefing of a pilot who had left Port Stanley on 24 April and had confirmed that the airfield had so far only been extended by about 50', and had seen aircraft testing the extended part of the runway. The Chief of Air Staff also asked that the BBC film of President Galtieri's visit to Port Stanley should be closely examined by intelligence experts since it had shown quite extensive parts of Port Stanley airfield in the background.

(b) Rules of Engagement. The Chief of Defence Staff pointed out that there was now an additional tanker in the area, and that he would like to see this added to the existing list of naval auxiliaries in the ROE. He also suggested that some warning should be sent to the Argentines on the use of fishing vessels. Mr. Nott said that he would be concerned if there were any risk of the ROE being changed to allow an LST to be torpedoed before the Total Exclusion Zone had been put into effect. The CDS thought that any further action could probably await the promulgation of the TEZ. On the question of fishing vessels, the CNS said a submission to the Secretary of State was in hand. I asked whether a warning to the Swiss was being considered, in addition to any public announcement, and was assured that we would be fully consulted.

(c) The Argentine Reaction to South Georgia. I read to the meeting extracts from Washington telegram No. 1449, including the claim by Costa Mendez that the Argentines had not known about the South Georgia operation in advance. The CDS hoped that we would point out that the Argentine media had made a great deal of a supposed invasion 24 hours beforehand.

(d) Prisoners of War. There was a brief discussion about what should be done on Argentine prisoners and on BAS personnel. (I am minuting separately on the latter.) Although a paper is

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in existence on prisoners of war (agreed between the MOD and ourselves), the CDS said that he would prefer to await firm proposals from CINCFLEET before discussing this further. I said that we would be prepared to consider, as one option, chartering a ship from Uruguay; but the general thought was that we would wish to get the prisoners off as quickly as possible (but not by Bransfield, which is now too far away, and running short of fuel), and that the best immediate solution would be to take all the prisoners to Ascension Island.

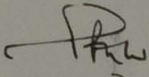
(e) Garrisoning South Georgia. There was some discussion whether a garrison should be left on South Georgia, and if so, for how long. The CNS said that he had been thinking in terms of a Company group, with assistance from naval units of higher capability than Endurance. He undertook to seek firm proposals from CINCFLEET.

(f) Disposal of the Sante Fe. There was some discussion about what to do with the crippled Argentine submarine at South Georgia. The CDS thought that the Fleet Commander might wish to tow the submarine out to sea and sink it. I asked whether it would not be possible to tow it to a nearby beach and strand it.

(g) South Sandwich Islands. Mr. Nott raised the question of the Sandwich Islands, and whether there was any intention to mount a military operation against them. CDS said that there would be no option for this after the end of May, and that any operation would require the use of Endurance (as an icebreaker) and about 100 marines. He doubted whether we should spend our resources in this way. Sir Frank Cooper argued that there might be strong political arguments for repossessing the South Sandwich Islands, particularly in view of their implications for the Antarctic Treaty. Do we have a view on this?

(h) Public Relations. There was some discussion whether the names of the ships which had taken part in the South Georgia operation could now be released to the press. Sir F. Cooper pointed out that the press had been stopped from mentioning any names under the D Notice procedure. It was also pointed out that the immediate purpose of withholding names had been in case of casualties (which we now knew had not been incurred), to forestall thousands of telephone calls from families. I argued that, on intelligence and political grounds, it might be better to keep the Argentines guessing, particularly since they seem to believe (incorrectly) that HMS Exeter had been involved. There was agreement nevertheless that all the facts of the operation should be collected together, with a view to the Ministry of Defence putting together a feature article in the course of this week.

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PS/PUS
Sir I. Sinclair
Mr. Giffard
Mr. Gillmore
Mr. Weston
Mr. Penn


(P.R.H. Wright)
26 April, 1982.

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