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CC(82) 14th  
Conclusions

COPY NO 79

CABINET

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CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet  
held at 10 Downing Street on

FRIDAY 2 APRIL 1982

at 9.45 am

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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 Lord Hailsham  
Lord Chancellor

The Rt Hon Lord Carrington  
Secretary of State for Foreign and  
Commonwealth Affairs

The Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Howe QC MP  
Chancellor of the Exchequer

The Rt Hon Francis Pym MP  
Lord President of the Council

The Rt Hon John Nott MP  
Secretary of State for Defence

The Rt Hon Michael Heseltine MP  
Secretary of State for the Environment

The Rt Hon Nicholas Edwards MP  
Secretary of State for Wales

The Rt Hon Humphrey Atkins MP  
Lord Privy Seal

The Rt Hon Patrick Jenkin MP  
Secretary of State for Industry

The Rt Hon John Biffen MP  
Secretary of State for Trade

The Rt Hon David Howell MP  
Secretary of State for Transport

The Rt Hon Norman Fowler MP  
Secretary of State for Social Services

The Rt Hon Baroness Young  
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

The Rt Hon Nigel Lawson MP  
Secretary of State for Energy

The Rt Hon Norman Tebbit MP  
Secretary of State for Employment

**SECRET**

ALSO PRESENT

The Rt Hon Michael Jopling MP  
Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury

SECRETARIAT

Sir Robert Armstrong  
Mr R L L Facer  
Mr D H Colvin

SUBJECT

FALKLAND ISLANDS

**SECRET**

FALKLAND  
ISLANDS

Previous  
Reference:  
SC(82) 13th  
Conclusions,  
Minute 2

THE PRIME MINISTER said that it appeared that an Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands and South Georgia was imminent. The Argentine Government had rejected every diplomatic initiative. President Reagan had spoken for nearly an hour with the President of Argentina to urge him to refrain from military action and had offered to send Vice-President Bush to see him immediately, but he had been totally rebuffed. All the indications were that Argentina had assembled a strong naval task force which was preparing to invade the Falkland Islands and could be expected to succeed in occupying them. One ship had been despatched to Grytviken in South Georgia with 40 marines aboard. The Security Council had met the night before. Difficult decisions would need to be taken if the Islands were occupied. A British response would be necessary but it was important at this stage not to foreclose options.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE explained British naval dispositions, including a decision to place a large amphibious task force in the United Kingdom on immediate alert. Twenty-two marines remained on South Georgia with orders to resist an attack. His preliminary military advice was that the task force, which was three weeks' steaming time from the Falklands, would be powerful enough to handle the situation which would arise there if Argentina invaded; a full military operation was in preparation. If Chilean air fields were available, that would transform the air situation. Nevertheless, the Chiefs of Staff were satisfied that the British naval force had sufficient air strength to protect itself.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS said that all the appropriate diplomatic action was being taken. The United Kingdom Permanent Representative at the United Nations had been given discretion to call for an urgent meeting of the Security Council when it became apparent that an invasion had taken place. Political Directors were meeting in Brussels to see what diplomatic action by the Ten might be possible in support of the British position. Later that day, he would see Mr Ramphal, the Commonwealth Secretary General to secure Commonwealth support, particularly from Canada, Australia and New Zealand. He had seen Signor Casaroli, the Vatican Representative, but without result. Diplomatic relations with Argentina would be broken off when the invasion took place. He was thinking of asking Switzerland rather than a European Community country to look after British interests. The appropriate advice would be given to British subjects in Argentina. He proposed a joint press conference with the Secretary of State for Defence later in the day which would also provide a line to take for Ministers generally. Officials from both Departments were also considering how to handle relations with the media during a possibly prolonged crisis.

In a discussion of what should be said in Parliament and to the public about the Government's reaction it was agreed that it was important not to arouse expectations in excess of what was militarily feasible.

Criticism, particularly in Parliament, that the Government had been taken by surprise and had failed to act early enough was to be expected. It was pointed out that the origins of the present crisis lay in the landing of the Argentine scrap metal merchants in South Georgia only 12 days earlier. There had been no reason at that time to think that this had been engineered as a prelude to the action that now seemed imminent. Even if a British task force had sailed then, it would not yet have arrived off the Falkland Islands. Moreover an Argentine invasion could have happened at almost any time during the past 15 years or more and it would have been impossible to have maintained a sufficient fleet permanently on station against that contingency. It also had to be recognised that Argentina held all the cards. It had a trade deficit with the United Kingdom. There were far more British subjects in Argentina and more British ships called at Argentinian ports than vice versa. They could occupy the Falkland Islands in strength and would be difficult to evict. It would have been provocative, and could thus have undermined attempts to resolve the crisis by diplomatic means, to have taken overt military action before Argentine intentions had become clear. An undertaking had been given to the President of the United States that the United Kingdom would not escalate the crisis, in the belief that direct intervention by the President of the United States would have some effect.

A statement for the Lord Privy Seal to make to Parliament at 11.00 am was approved. It would refer to the fact that there were British ships at sea and that the fleet had been brought to immediate notice.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that naval and military preparations should continue as planned in order that no options for future action should be foreclosed. A decision to instruct the naval task force to sail should be considered later, in the light of an updated military appreciation of the situation. A small group consisting of the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Lord President of the Council and the Secretary of State for Defence would meet as necessary over the weekend. A further meeting of the Cabinet would be called if necessary. It might be appropriate for the Secretaries of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and Defence to hold a joint press conference later in the day. They would wish to bear in mind the points made in the discussion and the statement by the Lord Privy Seal in Parliament that morning.

The Cabinet -

Took note with approval of the Prime Minister's summing up.

Cabinet Office

2 April 1982