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OD(SA)(82) 61st 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
TUESDAY 22 JUNE 1982 at 10.00 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 John Nott MP
Secretary of State for Defence

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 Michael Palliser
Cabinet Office

SECRETARIAT

Sir Robert Armstrong
Mr A D S Goodall
Mr R L L Facer
Brigadier J A C G Eyre

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1. MILITARY ISSUES

THE CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE STAFF said that the Argentines on Southern Thule had been armed with infantry weapons and had engaged in no scientific activities other than meteorological observations. All the Argentine prisoners could be repatriated without using the Canberra again, leaving only the special prisoners who totalled 515 plus 35 volunteers who were helping to clear mines. There was evidence that the Argentine commanders had treated their troops badly: many of the conscripts were short of food, though the officers and non-commissioned officers had plenty.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that all the remaining Argentine prisoners should be repatriated except the 515 special prisoners and the 35 volunteers, who should be kept in the Falkland Islands for the time being: their future could be reviewed after her return from New York. The prevailing political confusion in Buenos Aires made it difficult at present to secure confirmation from the Argentines that hostilities had ceased. Argentine claims that the prisoners had been badly treated while in British custody should be firmly rebutted. Mr Hunt's party, including wives and teachers, should return as soon as transport arrangements could be made. It would be desirable for Admiral Woodward and Major General Moore to give a joint press conference on their return to the United Kingdom.

The Sub-Committee -

1. Invited the Defence Secretary, in consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, to arrange for a summary of the facts about the condition of Argentine prisoners of war to be prepared for the Prime Minister's use in New York and to be made available to the press, including foreign correspondents in London.
2. Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to make similar material available to Her Majesty's Missions abroad.
3. Invited the Defence Secretary to examine the possibility of enabling British soldiers on the Falklands to telephone their families in the United Kingdom without charge.

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2. POLITICAL ISSUES

The Sub-Committee had before them telegrams nos. 1035 and 1036 from the United Kingdom Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Sir Anthony Parsons, reporting an Argentine protest about the action taken to repossess Southern Thule and suggesting the likely line of questioning at the Prime Minister's press conference in New York on 23 June.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that Argentine failure to implement operative paragraphs 1 and 2 of Security Council Resolution 502, had removed the obligation on the United Kingdom in operative paragraph 3 to negotiate about sovereignty. It would be difficult to envisage practical co-operation with Argentina being restored to the level preceding the invasion, nor was this necessarily desirable. For a considerable time the main task would be rehabilitation. The United Nations Secretary General, Senor Perez de Cuellar, should be apprised of the terms of the proposal for a complete cessation of hostilities made by the United Kingdom to the Argentine Government through the Swiss, to which no direct Argentine reply had yet been received, and consideration should thereafter be given to publicising it more widely. Meanwhile the Secretary General should not be given an opportunity to resume his mandate. No firm proposals for the future status of the Islands should be put forward until the islanders could be consulted. In her press conference she would emphasise the need for time for reconstruction and reflection before the future of the Islands could be discussed.

The Sub-Committee -

Took note.

Cabinet Office

22 June 1982

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