



Ref: B06572

PRIME MINISTER

c Sir Robert Armstrong

An Extended Permanent Airfield in the Falkland Islands
(OD(FAF)(82) 14)

Flag A

BACKGROUND

Flag B

The Defence Secretary's note was commissioned at the Sub-Committee's meeting on 6th July (OD(FAF)(82) 2nd Meeting) on the assumption that a decision to authorise the permanent extension of the runway at Port Stanley airfield would be required not later than the end of July (because the aluminium matting for the existing runway is assessed to have a useful life of only about two years, and it will take two years to build a new permanent runway). As explained in paragraph 8 of the Defence Secretary's note, however, final decisions on the site and size of the airfield cannot be taken until feasibility studies have been carried out, which will take until October. This less demanding timetable will enable Lord Shackleton's recommendations, and decisions on the garrison, to be taken into account when final decisions on the airfield are taken.

2. The note suggests that military rather than civil requirements are the determining factor in the choice of runway length. The Defence Secretary takes it (paragraph 9) that the costs will be considered as Falklands extra costs to be met outside Defence Budget totals. Treasury officials were not consulted, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer will need to be invited to confirm that this is his understanding.

HANDLING

3. You will wish first to invite the Defence Secretary to introduce his paper. Can he confirm that the requirement for an extended permanent airfield in the Falkland Islands is likely to be inescapable, although the only formal commitment required at this stage is to the carrying out of feasibility studies?



4. In the ensuing discussion, the following points should be addressed.
 - a. Is it agreed that the costs of the new airfield should be treated as Falklands extra costs to be met outside Defence Budget totals (paragraph 9)? Whether or not a medium haul civil air service is established to Brazil or Uruguay, an extended runway will be required for military use.
 - b. Risk of financial penalties (paragraph 9) It would normally take at least a year to launch a major project of this sort. The size and nature of the possible penalties are not clear from the Defence Secretary's note: can they be quantified? Is it certain that the temporary matting will have to be replaced in two years?
 - c. Airfield construction. Is it envisaged that overseas firms will be invited to tender for the construction contract? Should any restrictions be placed on the source of civilian labour?
 - d. Length of runway. The Defence Secretary's paper points (paragraph 3) to a trade-off between runway length and garrison size. This will need to be quantified when proposals are brought forward for the garrison. Subject to this, the advantage of a longer runway is that it would enable more rapid reinforcement in an emergency.

5. The following further points will also need to be addressed.
 - a. Staging facilities on the South American mainland (paragraph 5). The immediate need for these arises because until there is a runway on the Falkland Islands at least 8,000 feet long, no military transport aircraft will be able to reach the Islands from Ascension Island carrying a useful load without refuelling in flight; and the RAF's tanker force would be seriously overused on such tasks, in the sense that aircraft life would quickly be consumed. The response from diplomatic posts in Brazil, Chile and Uruguay has, however, been discouraging on the prospects of securing agreement to the staging of British military aircraft through these countries. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office would prefer to test the market in these countries on civil flights before tackling the military requirement. But this



would leave the Ministry of Defence in difficulties: until agreement can be reached with one mainland South American country, it may be necessary to move troops as well as stores by sea, at least over the Ascension Island to Port Stanley leg of the journey.

Playe

b. South Georgia (paragraph 7a). The possibility of constructing an airstrip on South Georgia was remitted for study to the Defence Secretary at the Sub-Committee's meeting on 22nd June (OD(FAF)(82) 1st Meeting). The Defence Secretary intends to study the feasibility of constructing an airfield with a runway of up to 9,000 feet on South Georgia (there is thought to be a plateau on the island big enough for this). Could an airfield on this scale be justified? Would it make more sense to limit the study to the provision of an airstrip long enough to take Hercules aircraft (ie about 4,000')?

CONCLUSIONS

6. Subject to the discussion, you may wish to guide the Sub-Committee to the following conclusions.

a. A permanently extended airfield on the Falklands will be required in about two years time. Decisions as to its size and siting will need to be taken in the light of the feasibility studies proposed by the Defence Secretary. These should be carried out on the basis of runway lengths from 8,000 feet to 11,250 feet and be completed by October.

b. Airfield construction costs will be treated as Falklands extra costs, to be met outside the Defence Budget.

c. Further consideration should be given to the questions of allowing tenders from overseas contractors and of using foreign labour.

d. The use of airfields in Brazil, Chile, or Uruguay for military staging purposes should be pursued, but not to the point where the establishment of civil air links is prejudiced.



e. The Defence Secretary's study on the provision of an airstrip on South Georgia should concentrate on what would be required to enable RAF transport aircraft to land there from the Falkland Islands.

ADS Goodall

27th July 1982

A D S GOODALL

CONQUEROR