

Prime Minister. 23A

Ref. A08373

MR WHITMORE

The Falklands

Content to proceed on
this basis - at least for
the time being?

Yes

KW

10.V.82.

We spoke this afternoon about the timing of the briefing for the Prime Minister and the members of OD(SA) on the possibilities for a landing on the Falkland Islands.

2. I have discussed this with the Chief of the Defence Staff. The first possible date for a landing is now the night of 20/21 May. This timing has slipped because of the need to divert the assault group to avoid Argentine reconnaissance.

3. A final decision on whether or not to go ahead can be deferred if necessary until the afternoon of 18 May at the latest. The assault group is not due to enter the TEZ until 19 May, and could be diverted up to about midnight on 18/19 May. If a decision were deferred as late as that, preparations would continue up to the last moment for a decision to land, so as not to close any options.

4. The Chief of the Defence Staff says that Admiral Fieldhouse cannot be ready for the briefing until the afternoon of Thursday 13 May.

5. I think that this timing is just about all right. As I see it, the timetable would be as follows:

Thursday 13 May, 5.00 pm, military briefing in COBR

Friday 14 May, 9.30 am, meeting of OD(SA)

Monday 17 May, further meeting of OD(SA)

Monday 17 May or Tuesday 18 May, am, Cabinet

6. The great advantages of this timetable are that it enables us to put the matter to Cabinet on the Tuesday morning, which would seem less like a "crisis" meeting; and that it leaves the weekend for any further work that may need to be done following the meeting of OD(SA) on Friday 14 May. Indeed it would be possible, if it seemed desirable, for a meeting to be held on Sunday 16 May.



7. All this, of course, relates to the timetable for military decisions. If this is indeed to be the timetable, we should presumably be doing what we can to stretch out the processes of discussion in New York about a possible cease-fire and withdrawal agreement, so that those discussions do not come to "make or break" at least until after OD(SA) has had its military briefing and has had a first discussion in the light of that.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

10 May 1982