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OD(SA)(82) 59th Meeting

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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
FRIDAY 18 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

SUBJECT

SITUATION IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC

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SITUATION IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC

THE CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE STAFF reported on the situation in and around the Falkland Islands. The total of Argentine prisoners now stood at 11,848. Between 900 and 1,000 of these would be held pending a complete cessation of hostilities. A message received from the International Committee of the Red Cross during the meeting reported formal confirmation from the Argentine Government that it was ready to guarantee safe conduct for Canberra and Norland, unarmed and unescorted, to put the prisoners ashore at Puerto Madryn (or for Norland to go to another Argentine port). Argentina requested agreement for two Argentine hospital ships and a support ship to take prisoners off from Port Stanley.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that this latest Argentine offer should be accepted: but until a complete cessation of hostilities was assured only the two hospital ships should be admitted to Port Stanley. In view of indications that Argentina might be contemplating fabricated allegations against the United Kingdom over the handling of the prisoners of war, consideration should be given to having representatives of the British press on the ships on which the prisoners were carried. In arranging for the repatriation of Argentine prisoners, every effort should be made to secure the release and return of the British prisoner of war and the three British journalists at present held in Argentina: the International Committee of the Red Cross should be asked to help over this. Certain aspects of the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) reporting of the Falklands operation had been seriously damaging to the national interest: consideration should be given to the best means of bringing this home to the BBC authorities with a view to preventing a recurrence. Steps should be taken to give publicity in Europe and elsewhere to the favourable press and media comment which Britain's successful conduct of the Falklands campaign was attracting in parts of Latin America, most notably in Brazil. This should also be brought to the notice of friendly governments to counter any impression of cohesive Latin American support for Argentina.

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The Sub-Committee -

1. Invited the Defence Secretary, in consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, to arrange forthwith for the repatriation of the Argentine prisoners now on board Canberra and Norland to the Argentine mainland, on the basis of the latest offer from the Argentine Government; and to arrange for the two Argentine hospital ships to take off sick and other prisoners from Port Stanley.
2. Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, in consultation with the Defence Secretary, to seek to secure, if possible as part of the arrangements for repatriating Argentine prisoners, the early return of the British prisoner of war and the three British journalists at present detained in Argentina.
3. Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to arrange for favourable comment on Britain's conduct of the Falklands operation and its outcome on the part of the Latin American press to be given appropriate publicity and to be brought to the notice of friendly governments.
4. Invited the Home Secretary, in consultation with the Defence Secretary, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of the Cabinet, to consider how best to bring home to the British Broadcasting Corporation the extent of the damage done to the national interest by aspects of BBC reporting of the Falklands operations and to prevent any recurrence.
5. Invited the Defence Secretary to arrange for an analysis to be prepared of media coverage of the Falklands operations with a view to identifying examples of reporting or comment which had been damaging to the national interest.

Cabinet Office

18 June 1982

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