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MINISTER OF STATE FOR
THE ARMED FORCES

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K. a.
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Prime Minister

SOUTH GEORGIA

1. In addition to our Statement in Parliament today and the next diplomatic moves we have been considering what precautionary steps to take in order to reinforce the British naval presence in the Falklands area, given recent increases in the scale of Argentine naval deployments in the area and the possibility of a further deterioration in the situation.
2. As you know, we have so far taken the following steps:
 - a. the strength of the Royal Marines garrison in Port Stanley has been doubled by holding back the outgoing detachment;
 - b. a support ship will arrive off South Georgia in two weeks' time with provisions for HMS ENDURANCE sufficient for another two months' stay;
 - c. the SSN HMS SPARTAN was yesterday instructed to sail to the South Atlantic as soon as possible after embarking the necessary weapons and provisions. She is due to arrive in the Falklands area by 13th April;
 - d. The Defence Secretary last night authorised the preparation of a second SSN, and we decided at our meeting this morning to confirm the orders for her sailing. HMS SPLENDID has been designated and should sail on 2nd April, arriving around 18th April.



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3. We are now considering what further steps might be taken. At our meeting this morning we looked at the possibility of sending a third SSN (which the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary favours). A submarine has been identified but has not yet been given orders to sail. There would be significant operational penalties which would, among other things, adversely affect joint operations with the Americans.

*I know
on the
news
this
morning*

4. The great advantage of using these SSNs is that their passage can remain covert until we wish to reveal it. Even if media speculation focusses on SSNs the Argentines themselves will be left guessing. It will, of course, be necessary to draw up precise rules of engagement for the submarine Commanding Officers. While on patrol they would carry out covert surveillance and would be available to afford protection to HMS ENDURANCE. If need be, their presence could be declared in order to deter the Argentines from any precipitate military action. In the worst case they could carry out formidable retaliation against the Argentine Navy.

5. We can meanwhile face Parliament confidently if pressed about naval contingency measures without, of course, revealing details. We retain political and operational flexibility.

6. We have also looked at the possibility of deploying surface ships. It would be possible to detach a force of 7 RN destroyers and frigates (with supply ships) from current exercises in the Atlantic off Gibraltar. It would take some 16 days for them to reach the Falklands area. But our intentions would become known very quickly, which would be likely to complicate our diplomatic exchanges with the Argentines. In any case, the Ministry of Defence have reservations on military grounds about using a detachment of surface ships of this size as a show of force against the Argentines, who could easily field a larger force, which could include their aircraft carrier.

7. A more credible force in military terms would be a task group comprising a carrier, at least 4 or 5 surface escorts, possibly a commando group of 800 Royal Marines and perhaps a submarine as well as support ships. Quite apart from the fact that this would take

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about 24 days to muster and arrive in the area, it would be very difficult and expensive to sustain. The preparations could not be concealed and it would prove highly provocative and hence escalatory, unless the Argentines were preparing to invade the Falklands. There is at present no sign of this. This option is being examined internally within the Ministry of Defence in view of the significant military implications. The Chiefs of Staff will wish to consider this and other possible options very carefully and their advice will be available when we discuss the matter at OD.

8. The MOD have separately reconsidered the possibility of reinforcing the Falklands by air and have confirmed that this is impracticable unless diplomatic clearance could be acquired to stage through either Uruguay or Chile.

9. We suggest that the way ahead might best be discussed at OD on Thursday.

for Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary

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for Minister of State (Armed Forces)

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