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Mr. Ure

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DESK OFFICER		REGISTRY
INDEX	PA	Action Taken

HMS ENDURANCE

64 1. The PUS was grateful for a sight of these minutes but before putting them to Mr Luce (and possibly discussing the matter with him) the PUS, who feels much as Mr Weston does, would like to know more about the two British Antarctic Survey Ships to which you refer in paragraph 3 of your minute of 8 october.

2. Under what flags do these two ships fly; ie blue or red ensign? Do they carry guns? If not, could they? How often do they put in to the Falkland Islands. In what way would they fail to do what HMS Endurance now does? What changes to their present operation would be needed to make them fulfil the tasks of HMS Endurance as regards the Falkland Islands? Who pays for these two ships and what is the cost?

4 November 1981

PS/PUS

1 Sir A Adgey
2 PUS

R. A. Burns
R A Burns
PS/PUS

1. The answers to the PUS's questions are as follows:
- a. the two British Antarctic Survey (BAS) ships RRS Bransfield and RRS Biscoe, are registered in the Falkland Islands and carry a blue ensign with Falkland Islands Dependencies crest;
 - b. they do not carry guns. The terms of the Antarctic Treaty also proscribe the carrying of weapons by Research Ships. Similarly they are not manned by Marines or RN personnel, nor could they be without changing their whole status;
 - c. Both BAS ships call at Port Stanley four times a year during the austral summer (November - April);

/d.

d. the ships are owned by the National Environmental Research Council (NERC) but are run by BAS. Running costs for 1981/82 are estimated at £910,000 plus crews' salaries of £610,000. The ships are tasked by BAS and NERC essentially for scientific activities.

2. When I said that 'In practice there is not a great deal that Endurance does which cannot be done by one or other of the two BAS ice ships' I was choosing my words carefully. The existing role of Endurance - ferrying supplies and personnel round the Falklands, their Dependencies and British Antarctic Territory - is very similar to the role of Bransfield and Biscoe. But she differs from them in two important respects. Firstly, as an RN Ship flying the white ensign she is a visible naval presence which puts heart into the Islanders and makes them feel that they have a seaborne defence capacity when she is around. Secondly, Endurance carries helicopters (unlike the BAS ships) which means that she can reconnoitre the remote and uninhabited areas of the Falklands and their Dependencies and reassure the Islanders that there are no further Argentine incursions (of the Southern Thule variety) on their territory. One can envisage circumstances in which we wished to remove an Argentine unauthorised landing party (possibly from an off-shore island of the Falklands themselves) and this could be undertaken safely and efficiently by Endurance, whereas the landborne Royal Marine contingent based at Port Stanley would only have a very limited capacity (they have a small, antiquated and unarmed transport vessel) to do anything about it.

3. In short, Endurance is in many ways similar to the Royal Marine contingent on the Island: it could no more fight off an Argentine attack than they could, but it does provide a visible and real armed presence which serves both as a morale boost and a tripwire.

J B Ure

J B Ure

5 November 1981

This is difficult, and of course in an ideal world and with greater resources it would be right to keep Endurance, or replace her. But we do have to set priorities and I find it hard to argue with the Prime Minister's letters to Sir Peter Scott & Lord Buxton.

2. I think that the FCO, must be wary of asking the MOD, to reopen elements of the package decided by Ministers. We will lose some credibility if we do & perhaps not achieve much if anything. Reluctantly, I think we should let Endeavour go.

Anthony Deland $\frac{6}{20}$

I too think the original decision was wrong and unnecessary. But, for the narrow gain in the interests of the Western as Sir A. Deland, with which I agree, I do not consider that we should try to have it re-opened. The true way wish to discuss this with us.

Richard Palmer

6/11