

Ref: B06497

PRIME MINISTER

c Sir Robert Armstrong

Falklands: OD(SA) on 18th MayMilitary Issues

1. The meeting will be asked to authorise the Landing, on the basis of the plan outlined at the COBR briefing on 14th May. If this is not authorised, part of the narrow window of opportunity will be lost. If authority is given, the Landing could take place any night from 20th/21st ~~April~~ ^{May}, depending on weather and other factors.
2. It will be essential to establish that, if Ministers authorise the Landing, they will be doing so on the basis of a plan unanimously recommended to them by their constitutionally-designated Military Advisers. The decision to repossess the Falklands if militarily possible is correctly one for Ministers. But it is for the Chiefs of Staff to decide what is militarily possible. Each of the four Chiefs should therefore be asked -
 - a. Do you regard the aim - of repossessing the Falklands - as militarily feasible?
 - b. Do you recommend this plan as the best means of achieving that aim?
 - c. Does the plan have a good chance of success?
 - d. Do you regard the chances of military success as having been reduced by any political restrictions imposed?
3. Their replies should be recorded in the minutes. This will be particularly important in two possible contexts -
 - i. If the Landing succeeds in establishing itself but does not lead on to repossession, no one should be able to argue that all the Chiefs were ever asked to do was carry out a permanent landing.



ii. If casualties are controversially high, or if the operation fails, no one should be able to argue that the Chiefs were bullied by the politicians into undertaking it against their better judgement; or that they were forced to accept political restrictions of a militarily dangerous nature.

4. You will not of course get them to tell you what the level of casualties, in men and ships, is likely to be. Too much depends on Argentine morale; and on luck. But it is implicit in the military advice that the level of casualties is expected to be "acceptable". But what is acceptable to military commanders (who are paid not to be sentimental) may be quite different from what is acceptable to public opinion. Are the Chiefs thinking of under 500 casualties? and not more than 2 or 3 ships? Or should be figures be eg twice that?

5. Once the military advice is clear, you will need to ask the Defence Secretary - whose reputation will be most immediately at stake - whether he is prepared to back it without reserve; and the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary whether he regards it as compatible with our foreign policy interests. In the latter context, the Sub-Committee should be reminded of possible damage to our economic and other interests elsewhere in Latin America, as set out in the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's memorandum OD(SA)(82) 52. You should also ask the Attorney General to confirm that the proposed Landing will not run contrary to our obligations under international law.

6. You should then establish that the Sub-Committee is unanimously in favour of the decision. It can be countermanded up to the afternoon of 20th May (eg if agreement is after all reached in New York); or later, if weather forces postponement.

7. Finally, you will need agreement on when the Cabinet should be consulted. They seemed to accept last week that they would be told, not asked. That seems to point to 20th May rather than tomorrow.



8. If time permits, the Defence Secretary or Chief of the Defence Staff may want to raise the Ministry of Defence's broadcasting proposal (OD(SA)(82) 50), on which a decision is urgent and still outstanding. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and Home Secretary are known to have doubts.

Diplomatic Issues

9. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary should report on
- the news from New York;
 - the prospects for United States military involvement in a settlement;
 - the position on European Community sanctions;
 - the possibility of lobbying Argentina via Brazil and Mexico;
 - what to do about the Pope's visit.
10. The British "bottom line" draft agreement is to be shown to the Cabinet later in the morning. The Sub-Committee will need to decide whether the Cabinet should be told of the 48 hour deadline; or merely that a rapid reply has been demanded.
11. The World Cup problem (C(82) 23), which is also on the agenda for the Cabinet later in the morning, hardly needs advance discussion in the Sub-Committee.

17th May 1982

R L WADE-GERY