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MEETING OF INFORMATION GROUP ON THE FALKLANDS

10 AM FRIDAY 21 MAY 1982

Present:

B Ingham	-	No 10
N Kelly	-	COI
N Fenn	-	FCO
J Gee	-	MoD
D Colvin	-	Cabinet Office
R Hatfield	-	Presentation Unit
S Fuller	-	Presentation Unit
H Mills	-	Chancellor of the Duchy's Office
B Mower	-	No 10.

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Military

There was some discussion of the Ministry of Defence briefing which emerged in the Press this morning. We should maintain our object of guiding away from stark changes between negotiations and invasion and towards the idea of a continuing and natural evolution of the military strategy to achieve our objectives with the minimum use of force. The "war of attrition" phrase was an apt one. The MoD briefing had indicated that we should be prepared to last it out for a matter of weeks but not months. MoD were to announce later in the day details of further Commando and air raids on Argentine military positions as well as a further British loss.

Diplomatic

It was agreed that the media outcome of yesterday's publication and debate was generally successful and the position made somewhat easier by the Secretary General's bowing out of the immediate round of negotiations. FCO identified immediate problems and the line that we should be taking as follows:

- (i) Why should we not leave our proposals on the table?

This was a carefully balanced offer made at a particular stage of the negotiations and having rejected it at this stage the Argentines cannot expect to go back to it as though nothing had happened. The Chairman said that he had briefed to the effect that we had given a clear signal to the Argentines that their intransigence in negotiations must affect the situation and that if there were a military operation to recover the Falklands it would change the whole atmosphere in this country in such a way that we would inevitably be starting from a different position. To this could be added that our minds are not necessarily closed and of course elements of the original proposals could well

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be picked up again at a later stage.

- (ii) Our attitude towards the Secretary General?

We should go out of our way to praise him: the Foreign Secretary has said in the House that we remain in close touch with him. He deserves continued support for all he is trying to do to implement Security Resolution 502 and we are very watchful of an opportunity to co-operate with him further. We should, however, discount any suggestion of Ministers going to New York in the near future.

- (iii) Why would we not publish the Argentine proposals in full?

They are not our property. It is up to the Argentines to publish and if they do not, the public can judge that they do not dare to do so.

- (iv) What are we going to do about Peru?

We remain open to sincere efforts to negotiate. The Argentines must demonstrate a clear desire to do so. The ideas were brief and procedural - not a new set of proposals. Of course we will not hold up any military operations as a result of this.

Economic

The Chairman drew attention to a clutch of stories concerning economic, or potentially economic, aspects including the blacking of British merchant ships in Peru and Venezuela, the proposed Astms conference against military action, the blacking of Harrier spares and the effect on sterling.

Weekend Arrangements

Mr Pym, having been interviewed for this morning's Today programme, is planning an interview for ABC on the David Brinkley Show on Sunday, an interview for COI transmission to Latin American countries (with Spanish dubbing) and is considering participating in World This Weekend. The Group suggested that Mr Parkinson should accept the invitations from Australian and Canadian broadcasting companies and the IRN. Mr Cranley Onslow would stand by for requests over the weekend.

The Chairman had not arranged any Lobby briefings for the weekend but asked the Group to be prepared to come in on Sunday if it were necessary to do so.

Next Planned Meeting

The next planned meeting of the Group would take place at 10 am on Monday 24 May 1982.