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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
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Telephone 01-~~938 702X~~ 218 2111/3

4th November 1982

*Dear John,*

POSSIBLE VISIT TO THE FALKLAND ISLANDS BY THE  
PRIME MINISTER

Thank you for your letter of ~~26th~~ 22nd October commenting on one from John Holmes of 22nd October, which I have seen on my return from the Defence Secretary's visit to the Falkland Islands and Ascension Island.

The Defence Secretary considers that the Prime Minister should visit the Falkland Islands. He believes that the Prime Minister would find a visit valuable and enjoyable and it would of course be warmly welcomed by the Islanders themselves. He does however believe that there would be considerable drawbacks in a visit which was known in advance, as would inevitably be the case if the Prime Minister attends the 150th Anniversary celebrations. Although we have yet to see the JIC assessment commissioned in your letter of 26th October, the Defence Secretary considers that we could not rule out some form of Argentinian response to a visit linked to the Anniversary celebrations. The problems of protecting an aircraft with the Prime Minister on board on the long journey from Ascension Island to the Falkland Islands should not be underestimated; and the garrison itself could be put under strain in preparing to deal with possible Argentinian incursions linked to the visit. The Defence Secretary's strong preference would therefore be for the Prime Minister to pay a "surprise" visit to the Islands on the lines of those which she has made to Northern Ireland, the timing of which could be kept to a very small circle. The Argentinians would then have no opportunity to plan some form of military action in advance.

As to transport to the Islands there have been some changes in our planning since we provided you with earlier advice. The highest priority is now being given to constructing accommodation for our Servicemen and to building aircraft dispersal areas and it is now unlikely that the runway at Port Stanley will be lengthened

A J Coles Esq



to 7,100 ft before March or April next year. The present 6,100 ft runway is suitable for use by Nimrod aircraft only when military requirements dictate that the risks involved must be accepted. But the Prime Minister and her party (provided it was kept reasonably small) could certainly fly from Ascension Island to the Falkland Islands in a Hercules with some form of VIP fit. The flight is very slow and the aircraft is inevitably much noisier and less comfortable than a passenger plane. But the discomfort involved has been over-dramatised in the press.

You referred to the reinforcement exercise. The CDS has now concluded, and the Defence Secretary has agreed, that a full reinforcement exercise should not be held before the next Falklands summer begins in November 1983 and this is not therefore a complication.

Finally, John Holmes referred to the question of the Prime Minister making brief stop-overs in Dakar and Freetown on her way to and from the Falklands. You may like to know that the Defence Secretary himself called in at Dakar and thanked personally the Senegalese Defence Minister for the assistance that had been given to us. Mr Nott considers that this is sufficient in the case of Senegal and, given that the journey to and from the Falklands is inevitably somewhat wearing and time-consuming, he suggests that the Prime Minister should travel direct to and from Ascension Island.

I am copying this letter to John Holmes (FCO) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

*Yours ever,*

*Richard Mottram*

(R C MOTTRAM)



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