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MO 5/21

28th October 1982

Dear John

FALKLAND ISLANDS FORCE LEVELS

At their meeting on Monday, OD(FAF) are to receive a presentation by the Chief of the Defence Staff on Falkland Islands Force Levels. Ministers may find it helpful, in advance of this meeting, to have a background note on some of the factors involved in determining force levels and setting out the proposed levels recommended by the Chiefs of Staff. I attach a note on these lines by MOD Officials.

You will appreciate that the attachment is not intended to seek decisions from OD(FAF) on these matters: further advice will be submitted after next Monday's meeting.

I am copying this letter and its attachment to the Private Secretaries to the other members of OD(FAF) and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours etc,

Richard Mottram

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A J Coles Esq

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FALKLAND ISLANDS FORCE LEVELS

Note by MOD Officials

INTRODUCTION

1. OD(FAF) discussed the future garrison for the Falklands and its cost on 6th September. On 1st November, the Chief of the Defence Staff will provide a presentation to the committee which explains the military basis for a future garrison consisting of some 3,100 personnel (excluding temporary construction and other personnel) on the Islands. He will also outline the risks associated with a smaller garrison of some 2,000 personnel. The Defence Secretary intends subsequently to submit recommendations to the committee on force levels and on the requirement for improved airfield facilities in the Falkland Islands.

THE KEY ISSUES

2. The issues on which decisions are needed are:
- a. Garrison force levels in the near term, subject to review in April 1983 or earlier if there is a significant change in the threat;
 - b. Whether to invest in an improved airfield on the Falkland Islands, capable of taking wide-bodied jets, in order to provide for more rapid reinforcement of the garrison. This improved capability would not, however, be available for around two years.

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3. The presentation on 1st November will describe the factors which are critical to the size of our in-place forces: the Argentinian threat, the warning we could expect of a large scale Argentinian assault, and our present reinforcement capability. It will also describe in outline the effects of acquiring additional tankers and of improving the airfield. These and some other relevant factors are described briefly below as background to the presentation. (This note does not consider the possibility of associating other countries with the protection of the Falkland Islands which is under consideration by MISC 82 Officials).

CRITICAL FACTORS

The Argentine Military Threat

4. The latest JIC assessment (1) of the future Argentine threat was made on 2nd July. It concluded that Argentina's armed forces have neither the capability nor the unity to mount a further major invasion at present or in the medium term, but they could harass the Islands and Dependencies and threaten Britain's lines of communication. It considered that the threat of such action was low but might increase. Some provocative action short of military confrontation was more likely. Argentina might attempt in this way to erode the morale of the Falkland Islanders and to make Britain's garrisoning tasks as difficult and expensive as possible. There has been no direct military harassment since this JIC assessment, and Argentina's internal problems remain severe. But nothing has occurred to suggest that the JIC's conclusions about Argentina's longer term aspirations, and capability to pursue them, should be revised. A note on Argentine military capabilities is at Annex A.

(1) JIC(82)(N)65

Warning Time

5. The JIC have also assessed ⁽²⁾ that at present two weeks' warning could be expected of a further invasion attempt, but that warning of harassment, particularly if it took the form of unilateral action by one Service, would be likely to be minimal. Moreover, in certain circumstances (eg preparations for action against Chile), it could be difficult to draw the right conclusions from the various political and military indicators.

Requirements for deterrence

6. Our unequivocal demonstration this year that we have both the political resolve and the military capability to regain and defend the Falkland Islands is bound to be a major deterrent to large scale Argentine aggression for some time. In addition, the JIC have assessed ⁽³⁾ that future Argentine military action:

"will be deterred first, by the resident British garrison, second by the total response capability of the United Kingdom (including its appreciation of the speed with which that response could be mounted), and third by internal political and international considerations Argentina will watch the size of the British garrison closely. Once the garrison has been established any significant change in its size or capability, particularly a reduction, may be regarded by Argentina as indicating a change in Britain's will to defend the Islands. Any such change in the garrison might possibly prompt an aggressive response from Argentina."

This suggests that a significant force should be maintained in the Falklands area, but that it should not be so large as to necessitate subsequent reductions in its size unless these were linked to a clear military purpose, such as an improved reinforcement capability.

(2) JIC(82)(N)71
 (3) JIC(82)(N)65

Requirements for defence

7. The size and composition of the force stationed in the area depends upon the defensive tasks which it is expected to perform. Any force which is requested to protect the Islands must as a minimum be able to ensure that the airfield remains open for long enough to allow sufficient reinforcements to arrive, to counter sea, air or land harassment attacks, and to deal with any illegal occupation of the Dependencies. Clearly, the smaller the force, the more limited must be its defensive objectives. Defence of the outlying settlements against a large scale attack, and the ability to intercept (as opposed to counter) armed raids, are the sort of roles which may have to be foregone with a smaller-scale garrison.

Reinforcement capability

8. The speed and scale of our ability to reinforce is the single most important factor for successful deterrence and defence against major acts of aggression. There seems no likelihood of South American staging facilities becoming available. The ability to achieve rapid reinforcement depends crucially upon aircraft availability and the capability of the airfield on the Falklands. At present to deliver all planned reinforcements would take 4 weeks, by sea and air. With a buy of some larger strategic tanker aircraft, this could be cut to two weeks. The availability of an airfield capable of taking wide-bodied jets could reduce this to 7 days.

Logistic Support

9. The larger the garrison, the greater the resources needed to transport personnel and supplies to the Islands. There is, in addition, a need to maintain in-place logistic forces on the Islands, irrespective of the size of the resident garrison, to maintain the headquarters and communications, provide minimum airfield and port services, and look after stock-piled equipment which reinforcements would require when they arrived on the Islands.

Impact on NATO

10. The need to deploy forces to the South Atlantic inevitably has a continuing impact on our NATO, Home Defence and out of area commitments. These are discussed at Annex B.

Costs

11. The key determinants of cost are:

- a. The size and composition of the garrison and its associated infrastructure (including the air base, accommodation and other works services, equipment stockpiles);
- b. Its assumed length of tenure, which will affect the scale of new investment;
- c. The requirement for roulement, which will determine the scale of shipping and air transport needed;
- d. The degree of detriment to other defence tasks and commitments that is deemed acceptable (see paragraph 10 and Annex B)

Advice on costs of alternative garrison levels and their implications will be provided in the Defence Secretary's subsequent proposals to OD(FAF).

Impact on Islanders

12. Lord Shackleton has drawn attention to the potential social and economic difficulties which could arise from the presence of a large garrison among an island community of 1,800 people. At present civil/military relations are very good. But the security benefits to the Islanders of a large military presence on the Islands must clearly be weighed against its potentially distorting influence on the local infrastructure and way of life. These already include some dependence on the garrison for transport, works services, social activity, health care and communications. There is a need to ensure that the Islanders do not become so heavily dependent on the Garrison that any significant reduction in force levels causes them serious economic difficulty.

FORCE LEVEL RECOMMENDED BY THE CHIEFS OF STAFF

13. The garrison currently proposed by the Chiefs of Staff is itemised at Annex C.

SUMMARY

14. In sum, the size of the garrison which needs to be maintained on the Falklands depends crucially upon our ability to achieve rapid and reliable reinforcement of the Islands. Until such a capability is established, the level of forces stationed on the Islands must necessarily be substantial. Once an assured rapid reinforcement capability exists, it should prove possible, depending upon the level of the threat then, to reduce these force levels significantly.

KEY ELEMENTS OF ARGENTINE MILITARY CAPABILITY

The key elements of Argentina's current military capability are assessed as follows:

a. Naval Forces

The Argentine surface and submarine capability was little affected by the Falklands conflict. The Argentine Navy retains a capability to mount surface operations against our forces but it is likely to continue to be inhibited from so doing primarily by the UK's submarine threat. However, the Argentine's two modern operational submarines have a significant capability to mount operations against our Naval and Merchant vessels and also to land Special Forces throughout the Falklands and Dependencies. Furthermore, several new frigates and submarines are currently under construction.

b. Air Forces

The Argentine Air Force and Navy Air Arm suffered heavily but they still retain a significant capability to mount offensive operations against land and maritime targets. Their current strength of tactical jet attack aircraft numbers about 60 and could be relatively quickly increased by new purchases which are apparently underway. We must expect, in particular, that France will shortly deliver a further 9 Super-Etendards (bringing the total to 14) and 5 AM-39 (EXOCET) missiles.

c. Ground Forces

The Argentine Army and to a lesser extent the Marines suffered a substantial defeat in the Falklands. Confidence and morale will have taken a hard knock. It will take some time to re-ignite the spirit of the Army. Nevertheless the Army and more especially the Marines retain a considerable capability to mount special operations throughout the area.

IMPACT ON NATO AND OTHER COMMITMENTS

1. The need to deploy forces to the South Atlantic inevitably has a continuing impact on our NATO, Home Defence and out of area commitments. NATO could regard the eventual level of forces as matter for special consultation (C-M(55)82). For our part we would, of course, strongly resist this and argue that the normal Alliance force planning procedures are more than adequate for handling the effects on NATO. All this will need careful presentation to the Alliance at the December NATO Ministerial meetings if we are to continue to reap their evident goodwill.

2. The impact of the Falklands commitment on each of the three Services is summarised below:-

a. All our major warships are declared to NATO and the fleet is fully stretched to meet existing NATO commitments. The South Atlantic commitments will exacerbate these difficulties. Four destroyers/ Frigates on-station would require some 6 destroyers and frigates to be committed to the South Atlantic to allow for transit times to and from the area. A diversion of forces on this scale would be a drastic reduction in the level of NATO commitment since these units would need to be declared to NATO at 15 to 30 days readiness notice rather than the normal 2 days.

b. In general, the Army would expect to meet the Garrison requirement by the deployment of units from BAOR and UKLF on roulement, and to rely on their rapid return to Europe during Transition to War. This would clearly represent a degradation in our most crucial operational capability, and placing the units at reduced states of availability will cause concern in NATO. In some areas, expensive though

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this would be, the operational degradation could be such as to leave little alternative but to raise an additional unit or surrender a capability altogether.

c. As regards the RAF, the aircraft deployed to the South Atlantic would still be declared to NATO although at a lower state of readiness. The deployment of the Rapier units would represent a 25% reduction in the UK Rapier forces under CINCENT's command. In addition, the deployed Chinook helicopters also represent a 25% reduction in the declared force. Both the Rapier units and helicopters would of course take correspondingly longer to return to Europe should the need arise.

3. The effect on NATO commitments could be ameliorated to some extent by, for example, bringing forward and operating the projected Standby squadron, raising new Army units and the purchase of additional aircraft helicopters and Rapiers. But there would, of course, be substantial costs involved.

COMPOSITION AND ROLES OF THE PROPOSED GARRISONa. Maritime Defence

1 nuclear-powered submarine (SSN)	Anti-Surface Ship and submarine operations Deterrent
4 Destroyers or Frigates	Maritime and Air Defence operations
Ice Patrol Ship (Summer only)	Patrol Dependencies
3 Armed Patrol Craft	Coastal operations
1 Fleet Replenishment Ship	Fleet Replenishment and Helicopter Carrier
1 Fleet Oiler	Fleet Replenishment and Helicopter Carrier
5 Sea King Helicopters	Anti-Submarine Warfare and surface surveillance

b. Land Defence

Infantry Battalion and 1 Company	Teeth Arms
5 Chinook Helicopters	Heavy lift
3 Sea Kings	Medium lift and Search & Rescue
1 Field Troop (3 x 105mm guns)	Artillery
Army Air Corps Flight (6 Scout; 3 Gazelle Helicopters)	Reconnaissance
1 Royal Engineer Field Squadron	Essential Combat Support

c. Air Defence

8 Phantoms	Forward Air Defence
4 Harriers	Attack and Air Defence
3 Early Warning Radars	Early Warning
2 Hercules	Air to Air refuelling and maritime surveillance
20 Rapier Missile Fire Units	Point Defence; Port Stanley and San Carlos
8 Blowpipe Fire Units	Point Defence