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PRIME MINISTERARGENTINE NEXT OF KIN VISIT

Since the ICRC decided that it could not be associated with the Argentine next-of-kin visit Senor Destefanis has announced that he still intends to go ahead (with journalists including British press and TV cameras on board) and sail on 30th April. He has said that if he is challenged by British forces he will stop, hold a service at sea, and then return to Argentina. However there is a possibility that, when challenged and told not to proceed further, he will refuse to stop. In these circumstances it would be impossible to prevent him proceeding without resort to a degree of force.

2. Any attempt to force the ship to change course by physically using one of our own ships would risk collision and thus damage and casualties. The only practical alternative, if our warnings were ignored, would be to open fire on the ship. Clearly either of these courses of action would carry the risk of loss of life to civilians on the Argentine ship and to our own forces. We would also, unless the Argentine ship fired first, place ourselves in the wrong so far as international public opinion was concerned. I therefore believe that we would have no alternative, if Destefanis refused to turn back, to escort his ship towards the Islands. We need to consider the instructions we should give to CBFFI if he is faced with this situation.

3. The first point to make is that it is possible, although unlikely, that the Argentine forces might seek to take advantage of one of



our destroyers or frigates being drawn to the edge of the FIPZ to launch an attack on her, particularly since the date of arrival of the Argentine vessel (the Lago Lacar) is likely to coincide with the anniversary of the sinking of the Belgrano (2nd May). We must guard against this. For this reason, once the vessel has been identified by normal surveillance means, I propose that the initial challenge at the edge of the FIPZ should be by helicopter. This method should present the least risk of a surprise attack on our forces. If the Lago Lacar refuses to withdraw it would be kept under aerial surveillance and met by two warships at an early stage but at a distance judged by CBFFI not to involve an unacceptable risk of surprise attack. We would deploy a nuclear submarine to give early warning of any air attack on our forces, and another to trail the ship itself. There would also be a combat air patrol provided by our Phantoms. A further instruction to withdraw would be given.

4. If Destefanis still carries on I believe we should then seek to escort the vessel (by placing one of our warships on either side of it) to Choiseul Sound, the nearest anchorage to the Argentine cemetery at Darwin. Once the ship has anchored, it could then be boarded, although if this was opposed there would still be a risk of casualties. Given the media presence, I suggest it would be more prudent to allow the party to disembark (they would have to do so using small boats). We would then have the option of refusing them entry and ordering them to re-embark, arresting any who refuse to comply, (I understand this is quite lawful under the Falkland Islands Immigration Ordinance 1965) or permitting a visit to the cemetery.

5. This is a difficult decision, but in view of the likely reaction if we are seen to prevent an apparently humanitarian visit to the graves (and the press will undoubtedly make the most of this) I believe we should allow the visit to proceed on our terms and under our control. I have considered whether it would be right to ask for an ICRC observer to be present but this would have to be arranged



well in advance, thus signalling our preparedness in the last resort to allow the visit to proceed. We should of course prevent anyone in uniform, bearing arms or carrying an Argentine flag from accompanying the party. I am doubtful whether we should also exclude Destefanis himself. I understand that he claims to have a relative amongst the Argentine missing. The press pose a particularly difficult problem. If those on the ship are excluded they will argue that other representatives of the world's press on the island are being afforded facilities and there is no case for their being treated differently. If we take the line that no press of any kind can attend, comparisons will be drawn with the very full coverage given to the visit of our own next-of-kin.

6. The boats should be met as they land by a Police Officer, although he will clearly need to be supported by an Army detachment. In the event of a refusal to comply with the orders of the Police, there would be no time for further consultation with the FIG; the military officer in command on the spot would take charge of any subsequent action. Should arrests be necessary, they should be carried out with minimum force (although casualties might still result), and the individuals concerned invited to return to the Lago Lacar. If they refused, they would have to ^{be} taken into custody and returned to Argentina in due course by sea or air via a neutral country.

7. There is one other major possibility that we must cater for: an attempt to land elsewhere than Darwin, most probably at Port Stanley. In this case I believe we should attempt to block the entrance to Stanley Harbour, forcing any landing to take place near Port William. In this event anyone attempting to land would be ordered to re-embark and if they refuse would be arrested.

8. This minute covers a series of contingencies, most of which I judge unlikely to occur. But we must be prepared for these eventualities and, although we must leave a reasonable degree of discretion to those on the spot, we need to give CBFFI and the Civil



Commissioner broad guidance on how they should react. Subject to our discussion on 27th April, I therefore propose to send further guidance to CBFFI to supplement that sent following our earlier discussion.

9. I am sending copies of this minute to our colleagues on OD(EM) and Sir Robert Armstrong.

M. J. A.

Ministry of Defence
26th April 1983



26 APR 1983



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PRIME MINISTER

ARGENTINE NEXT OF KIN VISIT

As the attached minutes of the Defence Secretary, Mr. Goodall and Sir Anthony Parsons show, the question of how we should handle Destefanis, if he does set sail for the Falklands, bristles with difficulties.

But none of this advice considers two important points:

- (a) The attitude of the Islanders - from everything we have heard the Islanders would be strongly opposed to the Destefanis group being allowed to visit the cemetery.
- (b) The precedent - if Destefanis does set out, ignores our challenges, and is eventually allowed to visit the cemetery, what is to stop a series of Argentine groups trying the same tactic?

It is not easy to see a way through all the problems, but my own inclination would be to issue a further public statement in the next couple of days saying that we have noted Destefanis' publicly declared intention to sail, that we have made it clear that his proposal does not satisfy the conditions which we conveyed to the ICRC and that therefore he will not be allowed to visit the Falkland Islands. Meanwhile, we remain prepared to allow a genuinely humanitarian visit.

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If he nevertheless proceeds, and disobeys instructions to turn back, I would favour action to make his ship anchor at a suitable point off the Falklands where it would have to wait until the passengers saw that they were not going to get permission to land, and therefore returned to Argentina. This will be awkward in media terms (though there must be a good chance that this situation will never be reached), but I think it will be even more awkward, given everything we have said and given the attitude of the Islanders, if we allow Destefanis and his group to reach the cemetery.

A.J.C.

26 April 1983

Ref: B06769

PRIME MINISTER

c Sir Robert Armstrong

OD(EM): Argentine Next of Kin Visit

BACKGROUND

Following the discussion in Cabinet on 21st April, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence have considered how to handle the situation that would be created if Senor Osvaldo Destefanis of the "Centre of Volunteers for the Fatherland" carries out his declared intention to sail for the Falklands on 30th April in the Argentine ship "Lago Lacar".

2. The Defence Secretary has circulated a minute explaining the difficulties of preventing the voyage without risking loss of life, and making the following proposals.

a. The ship should be challenged at the edge of the Falkland Islands Protection Zone (FIPZ) by a helicopter. (Although the minute does not say so in terms, it is the intention that the helicopter should establish oral contact with the ship and instruct her to turn back.)

b. If the ship refuses to withdraw it should be escorted by two warships to Choiseul Sound near the Argentine cemetery at Darwin.

c. The Argentine party should be allowed to disembark in small boats and visit the cemetery under British control. We would prevent anyone in uniform, bearing arms or carrying an Argentine flag from accompanying the party, but neither Destefanis himself nor the press would be excluded.

d. The boats should be met as they land by a police officer, supported by an Army detachment.

3. Buenos Aires telegrams nos. 311 and 312 of 22nd April report threats against British residents and firms if Britain maintains its ban on the voyage.

4. The Attorney General, the Chief of the Defence Staff, the Chief of the Naval Staff and the Legal Adviser at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Sir Ian Sinclair, have been invited. The Chancellor of the Exchequer is unable to be present. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary is giving lunch to the Prime Minister of Fiji and may be a few minutes late.

HANDLING

5. You should invite the Defence Secretary to open the discussion. There are three basic questions for the Sub-Committee to consider.

a. Assuming that the ship poses no threat to our forces, how far should we go in seeking to turn her back? Should any force, or threat of force, be used?

b. If the ship proceeds, what arrangements should be made for her reception in the Falkland Islands?

c. Once the ship has reached the Falklands, should permission to land her passengers be refused or should we acquiesce in a visit to the cemetery by bona fide next of kin?

6. In considering these questions, it will be important to bear in mind the presence of representatives of the press on Destefanis' ship, as well as on the Islands. The Sub-Committee will wish to take into account domestic, islander and international opinion, the last if only to maintain the present level of international support for our Falklands policies and to avoid making it even more difficult to secure communications with the Islands in future, eg for future visits by our own next of kin. Domestically the Government would be criticised if we were to attempt to turn away a ship which did in fact contain Argentine relatives whether or not we succeeded in doing so, while the islanders will resent any Argentines stepping on Falklands soil. If the Argentines are allowed to land, it will clearly be important to avoid hostile demonstrations by the islanders. In this connection you might ask the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary whether the problem of the Argentine cemetery being on Falkland Islands Company (FIC) land has been overcome: the local FIC manager was reported as saying that he would refuse permission for Argentine next of kin to enter on his land.

CONCLUSION

7. Subject to the discussion, the Sub-Committee might be guided to conclude that instructions should be sent to the Commander, British Forces and to the Civil Commissioner to handle the unauthorised Argentine next of kin visit organised by Destefanis on the following lines.

i. The Argentine ship should be identified, intercepted by helicopter at the edge of the FIPZ , and instructed to turn back.

ii. If the ship disregards this instruction, she should be allowed to proceed under escort to Choiseul Sound and to disembark passengers in small boats.

iii. Genuine next of kin should be allowed ashore to visit the cemetery subject to the conditions proposed by the Defence Secretary; the visit should take place during daylight but should be completed as rapidly as possible, and the press should be allowed to attend. There should be no official Falkland Islands Government involvement (other than police).

iv. We should seek to prevent any attempt to land elsewhere than Darwin.

David Goodall

26th April 1983

A D S GOODALL

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cc Mr. Jackling

MR. COLES

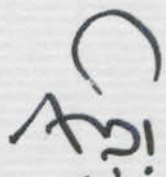
ARGENTINE NEXT OF KIN VISIT

I have seen a copy of the Defence Secretary's minute of 26 April.

In formulating our original policy about this visit, we had two objectives - first to safeguard our next of kin visit through Uruguay (achieved) and secondly to ensure either that the visit took place in an orderly way under our conditions or that we would not incur international obloquy if the conditions were rejected and the visit did not take place. If Destafanis forces the issue and we eventually allow the visit to take place without our conditions having been met, we will in effect have surrendered to blackmail. This will not only make us look foolish but it will open the way to further such visits which we would equally find it impossible to prevent.

I therefore feel strongly that we should stick to our policy and that we should not allow the party ashore even if Destafanis forces the issue to a point where the ship comes to anchor in close proximity to the Islands.

I am fully alive to the risks involved in violent incidents taking place, particularly the risk of retaliation against our Interests Section in Buenos Aires. However, I suggest that, at tomorrow's meeting, the Prime Minister might ask for further exploration of how the situation could be handled with the minimum risk of incidents, without allowing the party ashore. For example, if the worst came to the worst, could we not board the ship and impound it at anchor, making clear to Destafanis that we would continue to provide those on board with adequate facilities, but that we would not let them go ashore. Eventually they would get bored and go away. The British forces have a lot of experience in handling this kind of situation and they are accustomed to doing so with the minimum of fuss and violence.


A.D. PARSONS
26 April 1983

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