

1. MR WICKS

N.L.U

9.12

2. MR POWELL

3. PRIME MINISTER

AWACS AND NIMROD

1. When the decision is announced, whatever it is, there could be adverse political spin-off unless preventive action is taken. For a start, the press will be looking for another "Westland" and trying to discern ministerial dissent. So the need for a united ministerial front, once the decision is announced, is essential.
2. But that in itself will not be enough. If I were GEC, I would be ready to spring into immediate action if the decision were to go against me: I bet they have MPs' packs waiting to be sent out to all the affected constituencies, and likewise for the press.
3. It is imperative, therefore, that the Government are equally prepared to spring into action, with their own packs, immediately after the announcement. Ministers will need to talk personally to the relevant MPs. The press will need to be talked to and particular journalists singled out.

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Page Two

4. To mount an exercise on this scale and at this speed will require detailed advance planning, and the timing becomes all the more acute if a decision is announced before Christmas. The MoD are the logical people to mount such a campaign, and they have the resources of a major Department at their disposal. But I believe that they will need detailed political overseeing which, I suspect, only you as Prime Minister and No. 10 can provide.
5. You will obviously want to consider how you wish to proceed and how these overall objectives can best be secured. But I thought it sensible to alert you to the dangers at this stage so that you can, if you wish, set work in hand immediately.

S.S.

STEPHEN SHERBOURNE

9.12.86