

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG
CABINET OFFICE

Falkland Islands Company

The Prime Minister has noted your
minute of 21 April on the above subject.

The letter from the Prime Minister to
Mr. Needham has been issued without amendment.

JOHN COLES

22 April 1982

CONFIDENTIAL

Prime Minister

To note.

MR 24/4

Ref. A08183

MR. COLES

Falkland Islands Company

With his letter to you of 16th April, John Holmes enclosed a draft letter for the Prime Minister to send to Mr. Needham, Chairman of the Falkland Islands Company, in response to suggestions about evacuation which Mr. Needham had put to the Prime Minister on 15th April.

2. The evacuation of Islanders who wish to leave has been considered further both within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and interdepartmentally since the weekend. I discussed it yesterday at a meeting I had with Sir Antony Acland, Sir Frank Cooper, Sir Michael Palliser, the Chief of the Defence Staff and Sir Brian Cubbon.

3. The Government face a dilemma in dealing with Mr. Needham's proposals. If steps were taken on evacuation which positively encouraged large numbers of the Islanders to leave (even if their departure was described as temporary for the period of the emergency), there would be a risk of undermining the Government's position that the wishes of the Islanders on the future of the Falklands should be paramount. The Argentines, though for military reasons they might refuse evacuation so as to retain as many hostages as possible, might equally try for political reasons to encourage the Islanders' departure and attempt to replace those who had left with Argentine nationals, thereby altering the complexion of the Islands' population. On the other hand, if the Government failed to respond to Islanders' requests for assistance over evacuation and hostilities were to break out, there would be a risk of Islanders suffering casualties. In those circumstances, it might be difficult for the Government to defend itself against claims that it had not responded positively to earlier requests for assistance with evacuation.

4. Mr. Needham informed the Foreign and Commonwealth Office late on Monday that, after some days of difficulties with communications, he had again succeeded in getting in touch with his Manager on the spot. A party of 30 left

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

the Islands on 20th April and has arrived in Montevideo. Many of these are contract personnel rather than Islanders. The Argentines were apparently content that these people should leave. But Mr. Needham also said that his Manager's personal impression was that at the present moment there would not be a large response to suggestions that the Islanders might want to leave. Most people would for the time being want to wait and see what happened before making up their minds. The Falklands Islands Company Manager also confirmed reports which have reached the Ministry of Defence that the majority of Islanders had left the Port Stanley area for outlying settlements ("the Camp").

5. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office are keeping in touch with Mr. Needham. But the information conveyed by him probably reduces the need for the Government to take any early positive action over evacuation. A point could be reached (perhaps quite suddenly) when the Islanders' views might change and there might be a movement in favour of early evacuation. But we have not yet reached that point, and it would be a mistake for us at the moment to encourage departures. The British task force could not guarantee the safe evacuation of Islanders in the face of Argentine opposition. Any planning for evacuation would have to be based on the assumption that the Argentines would allow the Islanders to leave and to use Argentine (or other civilian) transport available locally.

6. The sense of my meeting was that, in the light of this position, the Government should make it clear that, if any Islanders arrive at Montevideo wanting to travel to the United Kingdom, and are in need of help from the Government, they should get it in accordance with the normal provisions for assisting distressed British subjects but with the rules being interpreted as humanely and flexibly as possible: i. e. up to now we have required those leaving the Islands via Montevideo for the United Kingdom to sign undertakings to repay to Her Majesty's Government the cost of fares, except for those deported by the Argentines. The Home Office said that there would be no problem with immigration procedures once they arrived. Provided that the numbers remain small, absorption on a temporary basis in Britain is unlikely to create difficulties, since most Islanders can be expected to stay with relations. But the Home Office

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

are making contingency plans for the reception of large numbers of Islanders, should this be necessary. These plans will involve securing the assistance of the Women's Royal Voluntary Service (WRVS) for immediate help at the point of arrival, and long-term aid for the minority who may need it, possibly under the "umbrella" of a co-ordinating committee. If evacuation of a large number of Islanders were to become necessary, there is no doubt that the Government would have to make financial provision to pay the air fares to Britain of those arriving in Montevideo and also their return fares to the Falkland Islands in due course. All this is consistent with the statement by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary in the House on 19th April that sympathetic consideration would be given to the question of temporary evacuation of those Islanders who wish to leave.

7. I do not know whether the Prime Minister has substantially changed the letter to Mr. Needham enclosed with John Holmes's letter, but there is nothing in the draft which I have seen which needs amendment in the light of the above.

8. I do not see any need for this matter to be discussed in OD(SA) for the time being. The Departments are getting on with their contingency arrangements. If these have to be implemented in due course, we should then have to consider whether Ministerial discussion was necessary.

9. I am sending a copy of this minute to the Private Secretaries to the Home Secretary, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Secretary of State for Defence and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Paymaster General.

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

21st April, 1982

CONFIDENTIAL

No.
It has been
upgraded and
signed.
HSL 4/14.