

278. Memorandum From the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (Iklé) to Secretary of Defense Weinberger¹

Washington, May 20, 1982

SUBJECT

UK Request for Replenishment by Three US Ships (U)—ACTION
MEMORANDUM

On 13 May the United Kingdom forwarded a request that the United States provide two underway replenishment capable oilers (T-AO) and one combat stores ship (T-AFS) to replenish UK ships in the South Atlantic. All three of the ships operate under control of the Military Sealift Command; they are primarily civilian manned, but have a small USN complement.

The White House, the Joint Staff and the Navy oppose acceding to the British request. The request goes beyond current policy guidelines, in that it clearly involves operational support. The Joint Staff is concerned that one of the U.S. ships could be attacked (Tab A). Furthermore, it is unlikely that such support could remain out of the public eye for long.

As an alternative arrangement, we could provide replenishment support to UK ships, operating in a purely NATO role within the NATO area, thereby freeing their remaining replenishment ships for operations in the Falkland Islands. The JCS is prepared to countenance this approach, if set under strict guidelines as to the nature of each replenishment that the British would require. The arrangement would be similar to the KC-135 tanker support that we currently are providing the UK.

Accordingly, I recommend that we deny the British request as it has been put to us, but offer an alternative arrangement for replenishment of UK ship operating in a NATO role.²

Fred C. Ikle³

¹ Source: Washington National Records Center, OSD Files, FRC 330-86-0042, UK 1982. Top Secret; Sensitive. An attached note from Cormack to Iklé, dated May 24, returned the memorandum to the latter with instruction to note Weinberger's guidance.

² Weinberger did not approve or disapprove the recommendation but wrote next to the approval line: "Let us offer the alternative arrangement w/o formally denying them their request yet."

³ Iklé signed "Fred" above his typed signature.

Tab A

Memorandum From the Director of the Joint Staff (Dalton) to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy (Perle)⁴

Washington, undated

SUBJECT

United Kingdom OP Corporate Request for Naval Underway Replenishment Assistance (S)

1. (TS) Reference British Defence Staff messages⁵ which requested that two fully abeam underway replenishment capable oilers (T-AO) and one combat stores ship (T-AFS) be made available to UK. The requests are for MSC ships to proceed as far south as possible in the South Atlantic to conduct underway replenishment with Royal Navy (RN) warships and/or support ships engaged in operations near the Falklands. The British have informally informed COMSC that the US ships might also be used to provide support between Ascension Island and a replenishment area 1000 to 1200 nautical miles north of the Falkland Islands for up to six months.

2. (TS) The Joint Staff has considered this request. In view of current US policy to provide materiel assistance to UK, with no direct involvement of US forces, it does not appear to be in the best interest of the United States to fulfill this request. Fulfilling the British request would appear to go beyond policy guidelines and could lead to direct attack on US ships by Argentine forces. These ships are primarily manned with US civilian crews, however, they do have an onboard contingent of active duty USN personnel. Additionally, such direct combat support, should it become a matter of public knowledge, would further damage our ability to pursue regional security policies in the Western Hemisphere.

3. (TS) UK currently has 11 RN underway replenishment, materiel, fleet support ships, as well as 8 amphibious ships, deployed in support of their Falkland operations. These are augmented by as many as 40 requisitioned or chartered merchant vessels operating in the same roles. The RN possesses 12 additional operational replenishment and fleet

⁴ Top Secret. A signed copy of this memorandum, dated May 20, along with a copy of the May 17 action memorandum upon which both Hayward and Small initialed their disapproval of the British request is in the National Archives, RG 218, CJCS Files, FRC 218-92-0030, 820 United Kingdom Mar 81-17 Jun 82.

⁵ The two messages, May 13 and 14, are attached but not printed.

support ships of various types in the NATO area not committed to the Falklands operation. In view of the substantial totality of vessels dedicated to support of the Falkland Islands contingency, denial of requested US assets is not likely to impact significantly on UK operations in that theatre.

4. (TS) The present request is too broad and open-ended. The OJCS considers that if the UK has a requirement for US replenishment ships, that the US ships would only be considered for a NATO role in replacing UK ships currently operating in the NATO area. Further the UK request should have specific justification for US assistance and include; name of UK ship to be replaced, specific operating location, duration of support and planned employment/concept of operations. A specific request of this nature could then be considered on a case-by-case basis.

5. (S) The OJCS concern relative to this request is primarily based on policy considerations rather than operational impact on US forces. There would be no significant impact on US forces for the next six months if a decision is made to fulfill the UK request.