

384. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom¹

Washington, August 13, 1982, 1942Z

227203. Subject: Falklands-Related Drawdown of UK NATO Forces. Ref: London 17463.²

1. Secret–Entire text.

2. Reftel notes that UK Government has yet to decide size and composition of permanent garrison in Falklands and South Atlantic, and that a number of possibilities are under consideration. It is our view that both US and UK interests would be best served by UK opting for relatively small presence.

3. We recognize the inherent sensitivity of this issue for UK and the controversy surrounding the decision. As a result, a formal demarche to MOD or FCO officials could be resented or even counterproductive. However, in conversations and exchanges on this subject, US representatives should use occasion to make our preference known.

4. In so doing, US officials should draw upon the following points:

—USG recognizes necessity of continued UK military presence in South Atlantic.

—A smaller UK presence would have military advantages of minimizing NATO drawdown, lessening UK operational expenses, and freeing UK forces for other contingencies.

—A smaller presence would also have political advantages of appearing less provocative to new government in Buenos Aires and not putting UK in bind down the road of having to make difficult decisions to reduce presence in the South Atlantic which could communicate unwanted signals to GOA.

¹ Source: Reagan Library, Executive Secretariat, NSC Country File, Europe and Soviet Union, United Kingdom (04/01/1982–07/31/1982) (3). Secret; Immediate. Sent for information Immediate to USNATO. Printed from a copy that was received in the White House Situation Room. Drafted by Haass; cleared by Raphel, Enders, Zakheim, Dobbins, and Binns; approved by Burt. (Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, D820422–0243)

² In telegram 17463 from London, August 10, Streator reported that the U.K. Government planned to “detach six frigates for the foreseeable future from NATO-assigned roles in order to maintain a naval presence in the South Atlantic” and that the six ships would represent a “net deduction from NATO-assigned forces.” Streator added that the “initial plans” for the size of the permanent garrison on the Islands was pegged at 3,000–4,000, although “a strong MOD faction is arguing for a much smaller, less expensive, and less disruptive garrison. Officials arguing for a smaller presence dismiss the Argentine military threat as insignificant; they fear that once established, a large garrison will drain assets, but be politically difficult to reduce without appearing to send the wrong signal to Argentina.” (Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, D820415–0319)

—A smaller presence in South Atlantic coupled with capability to reinforce rapidly should be sufficient to indicate UK resolve, deter Argentine military action, and defeat any military challenge should deterrence fail. UK should know that USG remains prepared in principle to offer logistical support in peacetime and in contingencies to ease UK operational requirements.

Shultz