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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

Telephone 01-2182111/3 (Direct Dialling)

01-218 9000 (Switchboard)

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Prime Minister

10th May 1985

I'm not sure its wise to talk about reducing our forces - see X on page 3 - right under the Argentines' noses. Agree to ask him to see Peter.

MOUNT PLEASANT AIRPORT - OPENING CEREMONY

take it out?

I attach the text of the Defence Secretary's speech at the opening ceremony of the Mount Pleasant Airport.

CJP 15/5

Copies go to Charles Powell (No 10) and Neil Kinghan (Mr Gow's Office, DOE).

I think it would be better to take it out now - we can decide in 15/7. I also think it would be better not to bring it to the Falkland Islands - what it is a relation with Argentina is not good. They may have different views

Your ear,

Richard Mottram

(R C MOTTRAM)

P F Ricketts Esq

to tell the Falkland Islands what it is a relation with Argentina is not good. They may have different views

SPEECH BY THE RT HON MICHAEL HESELTINE MP,
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF MOUNT PLEASANT AIRFIELD, MAY 1985

Your Royal Highness, my Lords, colleagues, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you, Sir Rex, for your welcome.

Today's ceremony is indeed a fitting climax to your memorable service in the Falklands.

It gives me great pleasure to accept on behalf of the Ministry of Defence the main runway and associated facilities of the Mount Pleasant Airport.

Ian Gow has given a vivid indication of the scale of the project and the achievement it represents.

I should like to add my congratulations to all those concerned within the Property Services Agency, the Laing, Mowlem and Amey Roadstone consortium and all their sub-contractors.

Thanks to their magnificent efforts we are able to be amongst the first of many people who will fly to the Falklands in the future by widebodied Jet.

May I wish the two consortia, whose task it remains to continue the project, equal success in their endeavours over the next 18 months.

We look forward to the final completion of the work early in 1987.

The benefits of this airport for life in the Falklands will be enormous.

The capability it will provide to reinforce the garrison rapidly in case of an emergency will greatly enhance our ability to defend the Islands and to ensure that the tragic events of 1982 are never repeated.

Without security there can be no long term development of the Islands.

The airport also exemplifies the exclusively defensive and deterrent nature of our military posture.

This facility is necessary for the efficient and effective defence of the Falklands.

It is not and never has been our intention to fortify these Islands or to establish them as a "strategic" base.

There is no NATO dimension to our involvement here.

The construction of this airport demonstrates the Government's commitment to defend the right of those who live on these Islands to live in peace and security under a Government of your choosing.

We do not believe this to be incompatible with our wish.

to restore normal relations with Argentina, [which is also in the interest of all concerned, including those living here.]

That is for them to judge

The airport will be of great benefit to the Ministry of Defence.

It will provide a permanent facility for the operations of the RAF in the Falklands, replacing the temporary matting runway at Stanley.

It will achieve considerable savings in the running costs of the garrison by allowing efficient roulement by widebodied Jet to replace the expensive Hercules airbridge and the time-consuming movement of troops by sea to and from Ascension. We estimate these savings alone will amount to around £25 million a year.

X In the longer term, it may also be possible to adjust the size of the permanently stationed garrison to take account of our capability for rapid reinforcement and of the rationalisation of supporting services when all the outlying elements of the current garrison are concentrated here from 1987 onwards. X

The proper defence of these Islands will remain, however, the overriding consideration.

Mount Pleasant Airport will also be a crucial element, perhaps the crucial element, in the economic and social development of the Falkland Islands.

After it is completed in February next year it will offer an international airport to Civil Aviation Authority standards for use by those who wish to develop the Islands.

We look forward to the day when civil use of this airport becomes progressively more important, and it will act as the Falklands link to the outside world, assisting in the expansion of export trades and a tourist business.

In its joint military and civil role, I am confident that Mount Pleasant will become another example of the excellent working relations that have existed between the two communities since 1982. I take this opportunity to congratulate the two Commissioners and their respective staffs for the efforts which they have made to further co-operation, sometimes under trying circumstances.

But above all I wish to pay tribute to the way in which you, the Falkland Islanders, have made our forces so welcome, particularly as their numbers so far exceed your own.

The eventual completion of Mount Pleasant in a sense will represent the end of that era, because nearly all the troops will be concentrated here soon.

There may be concern in the civilian community that the close ties there have been with the garrison will be weakened when this move occurs.

But the Armed Forces I know place great value on continuing contact with those that they are here to protect.

I am sure that, even when they live here, the Services will remain a familiar sight around the settlements and in Stanley and will continue to receive the same generous welcome and hospitality from their many friends in the community.

Today then represents a milestone in the development of these Islands and in the provision of the facilities needed for their defence.

It is with the greatest pleasure that I have the honour to invite His Royal Highness, the Prince Andrew officially to open the Mount Pleasant Airport.

DEFENCE
OF FALKLANDS

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