



Ref: B06546

PRIME MINISTER

c Sir Robert Armstrong

British Antarctic Survey
OD(82) 56

BACKGROUND

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary proposes an increase in the level of the activities of the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) to demonstrate our continuing close interest in Antarctica in the wake of the Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands and South Georgia, at a cost of an extra £4 to £5 million a year to be found from the Contingency Reserve in the current year and from a new allocation of funds in future years. The Chancellor of the Exchequer's view (his minute to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary of 25th June) is that the current year's costs should if possible be absorbed within the scope of programmes already agreed.

2. The BAS is maintained and funded by the National Environment Research Council (NERC). Much of the British Antarctic Territory is claimed by Argentina, and there is also an overlapping Chilean claim. Our title to the British Antarctic Territory is separate from our title to the Falkland Islands and Dependencies. The paper claims that cash limits have already forced BAS to -

- a. plan to cut the staff at Grytviken in South Georgia (not of course part of the Antarctic Treaty area) from 20 to 8;
- b. consider the closure of Faraday Base, thus reducing the number of BAS Antarctic bases to 3;
- c. cut out, probably, one of the two support ships, leading possibly to BAS withdrawing from Antarctica.

A middle course (option b.) would be to provide the extra funds, £0.5 million a year, needed to restore the previous level of BAS activities and avoid the planned cuts.

3. The Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Attorney General have been invited to attend.

HANDLING

4. You should invite the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to introduce the paper. Points to establish in the subsequent discussion are -

- a. Does the Committee agree that we should at least restore BAS activities to the levels previously maintained?
 - b. Does the Committee agree with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary that there is a strong political case for expanding the BAS? The Secretary of State for Education and Science should be asked if there is a good scientific case also.
5. In the light of the Committee's views on these points, you will wish to establish -

- a. Whether the necessary funds (either for the current year or in the future) can be found by savings elsewhere either in Foreign and Commonwealth Office Votes or by the NERC. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Education and Science should be asked to comment.

- b. If not, whether extra funds should be provided out of the Contingency Reserve for the current year and new money for future years. The views of the Chancellor of the Exchequer should be invited.

- c. Is the Chancellor of the Exchequer content that the extra funds should be accounted for on Department of Education and Science rather than Foreign and Commonwealth Office Votes, as proposed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary?

CONCLUSION

6. Subject to the discussion, the Committee might be guided to the following conclusions.
 - i. There is a strong political case for increasing our presence in Antarctica by expanding the activities of the BAS.

ii. The question what additional funds should be found for this purpose in the current year from the Contingency Reserve should be discussed between the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Chief Secretary, Treasury.

iii. For 1983/84 and succeeding years, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary should be invited to bid in the Public Expenditure Survey for the additional funds required.

iv. Any additional funds agreed should be accounted for on Department of Education and Science rather than Foreign and Commonwealth Office Votes.

ADS Goodall
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28th June 1982

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