



Ref. A083/1228

~~MR COLES~~

The Strategic and Commercial Importance of the South Atlantic
and Antarctica

--- I attach the Prime Minister's copy of JIC(83)(N)67, a Note on the above subject, which was approved by the JIC on 28 April. The Note assesses the strategic and commercial importance of this region to the West, with particular reference to British interests, and to the Soviet Union.

2. Much world merchant shipping, including strategic minerals for most Western industrialised countries and nearly half of Western Europe's oil, passes through the South Atlantic. The Soviet Union also has a commercial and a fishing interest. However, the United States does not maintain a permanent naval presence in the area and the modest Soviet presence at Luanda does not give the Russians the capability to exert significant military pressure in the South Atlantic.

3. The strategic importance of the South Atlantic is therefore low at present. It would increase if the Russians chose to deploy some additional forces there; but we have no evidence that the concept of basing a significant naval force in the South Atlantic forms any part of Soviet doctrine, nor that Soviet missile-submarines are likely to be deployed there.

4. None of the littoral States of Southern Africa and South America would encourage the extension of a general NATO/Warsaw Pact conflict into the South Atlantic.

5. The Antarctic treaty system is coming under question because of differing views on sovereignty over the continent and the growing belief, probably not well founded, that the region is rich in resources. The Soviet Union's research activities give it a



considerable say in the review of the Treaty but at present they try to keep a low profile on issues of resource development. Britain has an interest in obtaining the largest possible share of any benefit from Antarctic minerals.

6. The Note concludes that it is in the interests of both the West and East to ensure the region's continuing immunity from military tension.

7. The Note will also be seen by the Secretaries of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Defence, Home Affairs and the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

R P HATFIELD

29 April 1983

CONQUEROR