

Ref: B06903

PRIME MINISTER

c Sir Robert Armstrong

British Policy in Antarctica: Minerals
(OD(83) 15)

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BACKGROUND

The United Kingdom's policy objectives in negotiations with Antarctic Treaty partners on a minerals regime last came before OD in July when a joint paper by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Energy (OD(83) 12) was agreed without a discussion. But you commented that the question was of such potential importance as to merit further discussion. The memorandum by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary has been prepared with that in mind.

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2. The proximate reason for the paper is the second round of negotiations in Washington, due to take place in January 1984 following the first round in Bonn last July. But no new decisions are sought for the Washington talks, which are expected to conclude discussion of the New Zealand Chairman's proposals. Changes or adaptations to the British negotiating stance may be needed after the January meeting, possibly in time for the third round in Tokyo in the summer of 1984. But the process may be protracted, and the current policy line could then remain viable for Tokyo and even beyond.

3. Departmental attitudes vary in emphasis rather than substance. The Department of Energy give priority to safeguarding the United Kingdom's access to natural resources and is therefore particularly strong on upholding Claimants' rights. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is concerned to maintain the Antarctic Treaty, on the grounds that any conceivable alternative would be very much worse. The Department of Trade and Industry's interest is access to strategic hard rock minerals, for which purpose a minerals regime is essential. The Ministry of Defence is anxious to maintain the Treaty (and notably its demilitarisation provisions) and avoid the creation of any additional defence obligations.

4. A potentially complicating factor in these negotiations is the growing international interest in Antarctica as a result of the discussions on exploitation of the seabed at the United Nations Law of the Sea Conference, although the legal position is quite different. It is clearly in our interests to avoid parallels being drawn between the two negotiations.

5. The Secretaries of State for Education and Science, for Energy and for the Environment have been invited to attend.

HANDLING

6. You will wish to invite the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to introduce the discussion. The essential point to be established is whether there is agreement that the United Kingdom should maintain its firm Claimant position at Washington; and that there is nothing to be gained by lowering our sights at this stage.

CONCLUSIONS

7. You should be able to steer the discussion to the following conclusions.

- i. Approve the negotiating objectives for the United Kingdom delegation set out in paragraph 7 of OD(83) 15.
- ii. Invite the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to report to OD on the outcome of the Washington discussions with a view to deciding whether new decisions are needed for the third round in Tokyo in mid-1984.

David Goodall

14 November 1983

A D S GOODALL

FOR POL: Antarctica: Dec 1980

