LOOSE MINUTE

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FALKLAND ISLANDS

1. As some of you will know, the Anglo-Argentine talks on the Falkland Islands held in New York at the end of last month produced, as expected, no great encouragement for an early solution. Indeed, evidence is accumulating that the Argentine position may be hardening. The FCO propose therefore to discuss the future of the Falkland Islands again in OD, they envisage this meeting taking place at the beginning of April.

2. As an attachment to the OD paper, they have asked us to resurrect the MOD position paper on the Defence of the Falkland Islands that we produced last year and I am therefore circulating a copy of the draft that received COS approval last November. I would be grateful to know whether it still stands. Presumably we would not disagree now with its pessimistic message that little could be done but there may be points of detail that need amending (the reference at the end of paragraph 8 to the withdrawal of specialist amphibious shipping in 1984 occurs to me particularly). I would also be grateful if GF1 could (in consultation with DS1 as necessary) be ready to provide costs for the various options we have set out. The figures included in earlier drafts have been omitted because of CNS's judgement that they are misleading at the present speculative stage. But we may need to resurrect some financial gloss, if only to brief S of S for the OD discussion. It will be important that figures are consistent with other overseas deployments (the apparent discrepancy between the estimate of £20M pa for option 8a. compared with £0.6M per month for Op Armilla was especially commented on when figures were included).

3. In addition to this exercise, which sets out the difficulties attendant on a military response to Argentinian provocation, we need also to consider (and perhaps plan for) the prospect of a deployment to demonstrate our political commitment to the Falkland Islands. DS5 have already advised Private Office in general terms that we would be unlikely to be able to get a frigate to the Falkland Islands in under two to three weeks. But we may yet be asked to show the flag in this way. Could DS5 advise please what the minimum time might be to deploy a frigate assuming that we were forewarned and had earmarked a vessel for this purpose that was already engaged on

some other task in the Atlantic (ie assuming we did not have to deploy a frigate to the S Atlantic on the offchance that it might be needed)? The other way in which MOD assistance might be sought is in the airlift of supplies to the Falkland Islands, should the current Argentine shuttle be discontinued. My understanding is that even if a S American Airfield were open to allow such an RAF airlift the Port Stanley runway and other facilities would be unsuitable for sustained operations by Hercules or VC10. But, if there was a political imperative could something be arranged (DS8)?

4. Replies by 19 March would be helpful.

DH Powell

9 Mar 82

Encl

D H POWELL
DS11
MB 9325 7784 MB

E 79/3/1

DEFENCE IMPLICATIONS OF ARGENTINE ACTION AGAINST THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

(A Note by MOD)

Introduction

1. The recent JIC assessment (1) argued that the Argentine Government would prefer to pursue their sovereignty claim by peaceful means, but that if they concluded there was no hope of a peaceful transfer of sovereignty, military action could not be ruled out. Argentine military options were identified as:

a. Harrassment or arrest of British shipping.

b. Military occupation of one or more of the uninhabited islands.

c. Arrest of the British Antarctic Survey Team on S Georgia.

d. Small scale military operation against the Islands.

e. Full scale military invasion of the Islands.

This note considers the defence implications of seeking to deter or counter these options by military means.

Argentine Military Capability

2. Argentina, with some of the most efficient armed forces in S America, has the military capability to pursue any of the options listed above. Her navy includes an aircraft carrier, a cruiser, 4 submarines and 9 destroyers backed up by amphibious ships, maritime patrol aircraft and offshore patrol vessels, and with 5 Marine battalions has the capacity to mount a substantial naval or amphibious assault operation. Air superiority would be afforded by land and Carrier based combat aircraft. The Argentine Air Force inventory includes over 200 fighter aircraft and 11 Canberra bombers. Operational and logistic support are relatively close by, the Falkland Islands being about 400 miles from the nearest Argentine naval and air bases.

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(1) JIC(81)(N)34 dated 9 July 1981

Britain's military capability in the area

3. The Falkland Islands are nearly 8,000 miles from the UK. They comprise two large and upwards of 100 small islands with a population of about 1,800 concentrated in and around the capital, Port Stanley, on E Falkland. The two Falkland Islands dependencies, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands Group, are situated about 800 and 1,300 miles respectively to the South East and are uninhabited except for the 20 scientists of the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) on S Georgia and an unauthorised Argentine base on S Thule.

4. We retain a garrison of 42 Royal Marines on E Falkland, equipped with light infantry weapons, whose primary task is to defend the seat of Government at Port Stanley. The garrison could offer small-scale resistance to a minor localised incursion, but do not have the manpower, firepower, transport or communications to deal with anything but a very minor incident on one of the outlying islands. The part-time Falkland Islands Defence Force (approximately 100 men thinly scattered throughout the Islands) is of very limited military value.

5. The Ice patrol vessel, HMS ENDURANCE, patrols the area in the Summer months (Nov-April) but 1981/82 will be her last season. She is very lightly armed but has two Wasp helicopters embarked, equipped with anti-ship missiles. She has also a secure communications link with the UK. Her main value lies in maintaining a visible RN presence. After 1982 there will be only infrequent visits by RN ships.

General Constraints on Reinforcement of the Falkland Islands

6. Apart from South American airfields, which would be denied us, the nearest airfield is at Ascension Island, nearly 3,500 miles away. The only RAF aircraft which could cover this distance and operate

from the 4,100 ft Port Stanley runway is the Hercules. Carrying maximum fuel and with its payload reduced to no more than 30 lightly equipped men, the aircraft could cover the distance only with favourable winds. Moreover, the lack of diversion airfields, limited airfield facilities including aviation fuel and the adverse and unpredictable weather conditions, all militate strongly against using Port Stanley airfield for military operations.

7. A British military response to Argentine provocation would therefore have to be primarily a naval one. Reinforcement beyond the despatch of a frigate would probably have to come from the UK, since it is most unlikely that a suitable force would be more readily available. With passage time in the order of 20 days and, depending on the scale of the operation, the additional time required for assembly and preparation reinforcement by sea could take a month or more. There could be significant penalties to our commitments elsewhere.

Possible Reponses to Argentine Action

8. a. Harrassment or Arrest of British Shipping. While the amount of British shipping currently in the area is relatively small, it offers an easy target for Argentine harrassment. We could decide to deploy a frigate on a semi-permanent, deterrent basis. To maintain one frigate always on station would require the deployment of two, to allow for maintenance and unserviceability. In the absence of local South American facilities, two RFA's would be required in support. Such a RN presence might be effective in deterring harrassment, but the initiative would remain with the Argentines, once the force departed. Prevention of an attempted arrest of British shipping could require the use of force.

b. Military occupation of one or more of the uninhabited islands. A realistic force to evict a small military force from an uninhabited island would be a Royal Marines Company Group (around 150 men) with amphibious assault craft and helicopter support. In addition, a naval protection force (on similar lines to 8a) would be required. Were the force to remain for more than a few weeks, additional logistic support and resupply would be needed.

c. Arrest of the BAS team on S Georgia. To pre-empt a possible arrest, an additional detachment of Marines could be deployed to the Falklands to be stationed on S Georgia. They would need accommodation and, in the absence of a RN presence, would have to rely on a BAS ship for deployment and subsequent resupply.

d. Small scale military operation against the islands. Permanent or semi-permanent reinforcement of the garrison to deter a small-scale invasion of say E Falkland would require a larger force. This could comprise a Royal Marines Commando Group of 850 men including an air defence capability of Blowpipe or Rapier as well as support from amphibious assault craft, helicopters, engineers and RN ships. Air support would be desirable, but only the Harrier could operate from Port Stanley airfield and its deployment would pose formidable operational and logistic problems. Invincible or Hermes, as available, could provide Sea Harrier air cover and support helicopters but such deployment would be costly.

e. Full scale military invasion of the Islands. In order to deter a full-scale invasion, a large balanced force would be required, comprising for example, Invincible or Hermes with 4 destroyers/frigates, plus an SSN, supply ships in attendance

and additional manpower, up to brigade strength, to reinforce the garrison. Such a deployment would be very expensive and would engage a significant portion of our naval resources. Moreover, its despatch could well precipitate the very action it was intended to deter. If then faced with Argentine occupation of the Falkland Islands on arrival, there could be no certainty that such a force could retake the Dependency. Argentine national pride would demand a maximal response. Their geographical advantage and the relative sophistication of their armed forces would put our own task group at a serious disadvantage, relying as it would on extended lines of communication. After the withdrawal from Service of our specialist amphibious shipping in 1984, RN surface ships, RFA's or landing ships logistic (their own future now under review) would be required to transport troops to the Islands. If LSL's were not available commercial shipping would have to be chartered for the transport of an RM Commando group; whilst commercial chartering would be essential if a brigade had to be deployed, since the RN would not have sufficient resources.

Conclusions

9. Military measures to deter or counter Argentine military action against the Falkland Islands would require the despatch to the area of additional forces, primarily naval, and on a substantial scale. Any such deployment would be costly and pose considerable logistic difficulties. To deter or repel even a small scale invasion would require a significant commitment of naval resources, at the expense of commitments elsewhere, for a period of uncertain duration. To deal with a full scale invasion would present significantly greater problems requiring naval and land forces with organic air support on a very substantial scale; the logistic problems of such an operation would also be formidable.