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ILLEGAL LANDING ON SOUTH GEORGIA

1. I understand that the Secretary of State has asked for a note setting out the possible options for Naval reinforcement of the Falklands and also assessing the scope for conducting Naval exercises in the South Atlantic.
2. I attach a note by the Naval Staff which indicates and briefly assesses a number of illustrative options, in ascending order of magnitude. Save for the first two, the detailed implications have still to be examined by CINCFLEET. One possibility not addressed is relieving HMS ENDURANCE in the longer term. This is being considered separately.
3. Ships could be diverted to exercise in the South Atlantic, albeit at penalty to their normal programme: thus, option 2 would have implications for the conduct of the Gulf patrol and option 4 could mean effective cancellation of the major national exercise SPRINGTRAIN.
4. Any exercises would, of course, have to be purely national. In present circumstances, no South American Navy would be prepared to participate and it is probable that the USN would keep at arms length. South Africa is disqualified for obvious reasons. The South Atlantic is an unusual place for the RN to exercise. There is no especial characteristic which puts it at an advantage above the waters nearer home. Although, therefore, there might be some prima facie presentational advantage in deploying ships for a declared purpose, unconnected with the

events in South Georgia, the true purpose would not be difficult to divine. To this extent, such a deployment might be seen by the Argentinians to be just as escalatory as sending ships covertly to reinforce the Falklands. Conversely, it would of course be seen as a clear signal of intent.

5. S of S will have seen from the recent military assessment of the implications of reinforcing the Falklands the very real practical problems involved, not least because Argentina is capable of summoning up forces to the scene at very short notice as opposed to the fortnight at least that it would take British naval reinforcements to arrive. Short of the deployment of a major RN Task Force, the Argentines are always well placed to outnumber any RN ships that might be sent to the scene as soon as they reach the area.

20 March 1982

M. N. Nicholls
N H NICHOLLS
Head of DS 5

misdated - should be 29 March.

NAVAL REINFORCEMENTS OF THE FALKLAND ISLANDS AND SOUTH GEORGIA

1. Possible illustrative options for RN reinforcement in the South Atlantic are set out below in ascending order of magnitude. It would take about 16 days for ships to reach the Falklands from Gibraltar and about 20 days from the UK; in addition, in both cases a certain amount of warning time would be needed.

1. RFA FORT AUSTIN

FORT AUSTIN is due to sail from Gibraltar on 29 March to resupply HMS ENDURANCE. She will be available to support any ships that might be subsequently deployed to the area. She would also be able to return the out-going Royal Marines garrison, which would otherwise have been taken off by HMS ENDURANCE.

FORT AUSTIN would be capable of embarking a Company Group of Royal Marines (150) at Ascension Island en route should such reinforcement be required, for example to provide a garrison in South Georgia. She does not, however, carry helicopters for disembarking troops; and in any case it is doubtful whether Royal Marines reinforcement would be appropriate without the simultaneous deployment of additional warships.

CINCFLEET is still investigating options for providing tanker support for FORT AUSTIN's return passage, given that she is unlikely to be able to put into South American ports. The most likely solution would be to send the RFA PEARLEAF, which is due to arrive at Gibraltar on 1 April.

2. Two Frigates plus Tanker.

HM Ships BROADSWORD and YARMOUTH, together with the RFA PLUMLEAF, are currently at Gibraltar preparatory to participating in the major national exercise SPRINGTRAIN en route to the Indian Ocean for ARMILLA patrol duties. They do not sail until 5 April, and would be available for deployment south until that date. This force would not match the Argentine naval forces already believed to be in the area.

3. SSN

An SSN could be made available but, given the demand on SSN time, there would be both short and long term penalties.

Depending on the role that she might be required to play, an SSN could be deployed covertly if desired.

4. A larger force of DD/FF

Up to 9 DD/FF plus afloat support could be diverted from Gibraltar from exercise SPRINGTAIN. Save for the ARMILLA frigates, the ships are currently planned to commence passage back to the UK on 1 April. Minimal notice would be required. This option is not favoured as it would be provocative without being necessarily superior to the forces the Argentine Navy might muster.

5. A balance task force capable of effective action against the Argentine Navy

The detailed composition of such a force would be decided by CINCFLEET but it would include a CVS, an SSN, and sufficient missile ships and escorts and RFA support. It could convey either a Company Group (150) or a Commando Group (800) of Royal Marines. Were the latter option adopted, an LPD might also be needed. Such a force would take at least 7 days to assemble.