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FALKLAND ISLANDS

1. I attach a draft of the note called for by the Prime Minister. This has been prepared very hurriedly in consultation with the DPS, Defence Operations Staff and the Navy and Army Departments. It has not been possible to clear it with acting CDS. I suggest, therefore, that his Office should pass comments direct to you.

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A copy of the draft has gone on
the COSSEC word-processor, which
will facilitate any amendments.

R T Jackling

2 April 1982

R T JACKLING
Hd of DS11
MB 9326 3287 MM

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D/DS 11/10/6

FALKLAND ISLANDS

(Note by 12/10/6)

1. Is it possible for British Forces to re-take the Falkland Islands after an Argentinian invasion in strength?

We cannot be certain of doing so, even with the largest amphibious Task Group which we could deploy to the area. Our chances of success would depend crucially on:

- The size of the Argentinian force established on the Islands;
- Our success in preventing the re-supply and further reinforcement of that force from the Argentinian mainland, eg by the operations of our SSNs;
- Our intelligence on the dispositions, strength and capabilities of the force on the Islands and of supporting maritime and air forces.

2. What approach offers our best chance of success?

Assuming no access for our forces to airfield and port facilities on the South American mainland, any operation to re-possess the Islands must begin with a blockade to prevent reinforcement and re-supply of the Argentinian forces on the Falkland Islands. This might begin with operations by our SSNs, which could be accompanied by covert operations by the Royal Marine Special Boat Section (SBS) to destroy

airfield facilities in the Falkland Islands.
We could not be certain by this means of preventing re-supply
from the air, perhaps by parachute.

The blockade would be greatly intensified once
the amphibious Task Group had arrived, which would
have the capability of destroying the deployed
Argentinian naval forces and inflicting significant
losses on their land based, air forces.

air resupply

Once our naval and air supremacy had been
established, operations against the Argentinian
land forces in the Falklands could commence in
earnest. Good tactical intelligence would be
crucial to the success of this phase. The
operations which could be mounted against the
Islands by the Task Group would include:

- a. Intensified covert operations to gather
intelligence and to harrass;
- b. Offensive air strikes by Harriers;
- c. Naval bombardment;
- d. Selective landings to secure initial
objectives.

These landings would be made both by
helicopter and by landing craft and
would be intended to establish a firm
base from which to conduct subsequent
landing operations against the
Argentinian forces. These landings are
likely to involve up to two Commandos.

A force of this size, with a further Commando in reserve, could be fairly confident of maintaining its position on the Islands, if the maritime and air situation remained favourable. It is much less certain that this force could go on to defeat and expel a large, well-established Argentinian land force. Much would depend on the ability of the Task Group to sustain an intense level of naval gunfire and defensive air support, whilst continuing to maintain an effective blockade.

If we had access to airfields on the South American mainland, eg in Southern Chile, it could be that our ability to exploit the situation established by Commando landings would be substantially enhanced. This would not be decisive.

3. How would we maintain our position?

If we had re-taken the Falkland Islands, or if we had established a significant presence on part of the Islands, this could only be sustained by the continued presence and operations of a sizeable RN Task Group, including carriers. To maintain such a force at extended range and without access to a secure forward operating base would pose formidable and possibly insuperable logistic problems. It would be necessary to establish a re-supply chain over 7,000 miles, and this would inevitably involve the extensive use of civil shipping and difficult trans-shipments at sea. Every item of combat supplies and equipment for the force

would have to come by sea from the United Kingdom. The limited facilities at Ascension Island would not be able to support re-supply by air and sea. Access to Chilean airfields and ports could mitigate some of the problems.

If it became necessary to maintain a large force in the South Atlantic for more than three or four months, it would be necessary to draw so heavily on the total resources of the fleet that few other options could be sustained, except for SSB deployments. There would be no aircraft carriers to relieve HMS Invincible and HMS Hermes. The effect of our NATO declarations needs no embellishment.

Other Options

There are a few military options other than operations against Argentinian forces on the Falkland Islands:

- a. SSN Even without the deployment of a Task Group, SSNs could be a potent force against the Argentinian navy. They could sink substantial numbers of surface ships. They could also maintain an effective but not total blockade of the Islands, or Argentine naval bases on the mainland. Their operations could be proceeded by an ultimatum to the Argentine government.
- b. SBS/SAS Covert operations by SBS/SAS against targets both on the Falkland Islands and on the Argentine mainland could also be mounted in advance of the Task re-deployment.

Air Options

Given the use of the airfields in Uruguay or Southern Chile, it would be possible to conduct air operations against Argentinian forces, both at sea and on the mainland of Argentina, probably with RAF Buccaneers. Without the use of such airfields, these operations would not be possible.

Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA)

Would significantly enhance the operational effectiveness of our SSNs and could undertake other surveillance tasks. It is doubtful, however, whether the airfield in Southern Chile could support the operations of our MPAs, and suitable Chilean airfields may be too far from the Falklands to be a practical alternative.