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DRAFT MINUTE FROM SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

PRIME MINISTER

The Falkland Isles

A note by the Ministry of Defence on the military options that seem likely to be open to us has been sent to you by the Secretary of State.

2. The first moment at which any such option becomes available is when the first SSN arrives in the area; that is scheduled for Sunday 11th April. Instructions will need to be given to it as to what it should do.

3. It will also be necessary to decide whether the task force should proceed at the pace of the slowest vessels, in which case it would not reach the area until April; or whether the faster warships should proceed more rapidly, leaving the slower vessels - mainly those carrying the Marines and landing equipment - to arrive later. In that case the first ships could be on station in the area by April.

4. What military options are then open, and what options should be chosen, will depend partly upon the strategic and political objectives, and partly upon logistic and other conditions. The logistic difficulties of keeping so large a task force supplied will increase, the longer the force is on station; and weather conditions in the area will deteriorate in the Antarctic winter months of June, July and August.

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5. It would be a help in narrowing and refining the military options if you, and those of your colleagues whom you wish to associate with this process, could define the strategic and political objectives, by giving the answers to various questions which are set out below. I recognise that the questions may not be capable, at any rate at this stage, of "black and white" answers, because the situation can and no doubt will change in the time between now and the time when the task force arrives on station; but it would nonetheless be useful to have some preliminary indications of Ministerial thinking.

6. I take it that the strategic objective is:
To secure, by diplomatic means if possible but if necessary by the use of force, the departure of the Argentinian authorities and troops now occupying the Falkland Isles and their dependencies, and the restoration of British Administration.

7. Among the questions which need to be answered for the purpose of refining the military options for achieving this objective are the following:

(a) Are Ministers prepared to contemplate attacks on the Argentine mainland?

There might be good military arguments for seeking to take out military targets - e.g. oil supply stores, or loading facilities - on the

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mainland; but attacks on the mainland might tilt otherwise friendly international opinion, and countries whose logistic support will be valuable, against us.

- (b) Is it a political objective to minimise casualties, on the Argentine side as well as on the British side?
- (c) Is it a political objective that there should be no (or at least minimum) loss of life or damage of property of the Falkland Islanders themselves?

If the islands are strongly garrisoned, and if the Islanders are allowed to remain (or prevented from leaving, so that in effect they are hostages), such an objective could make it difficult to contemplate an assault landing in the Falklands.

- (d) Is it desirable to concentrate on the main Falkland Isles, or is it a secondary objective to recover the dependencies?

South Georgia, 800 miles to the South East of the Falklands themselves and out of range for Argentinian Air Force aircraft, could be taken by a detachment from the task force on its way to the main islands; a party of Marines could be landed, South Georgia reclaimed for the Crown, and the small Argentinian garrison

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now on the island cut off from the Argentine mainland and beaten or blockaded into surrender. There could be political attractions about proceeding to retake South Georgia en route in this way.

- (e) During the period when the SSNs are a station ahead of the main force, should they be confined to a reconnaissance role; should they be authorised to try to turn back Argentinian merchant vessels proceeding from Argentina to the Falklands; should they be authorised to attack Argentinian naval vessels?

I understand that the use of submarines to blockade or to try to turn back vessels is not militarily very satisfactory.

- (f) If it were decided in effect to blockade the Falkland Isles, issuing a warning that any ship entering an area within, say, 75 miles of the Falkland Isles would be required to turn back, would the Royal Navy be empowered if necessary to fire upon
- (a) Argentine naval vessels?
 - (b) Argentine merchant vessels?
 - (c) Vessels of other nationalities?

Once the British task force had arrived on station, the Argentine Navy might well be withdrawn to its harbours, and the

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Argentines might seek to use merchant vessels, of their own or of friendly South American countries, to maintain supplies to the garrison on the Falklands.

- (g) Similar questions could arise in relation to Argentine air transport, military or civil, to the Falkland Isles.
- (h) A blockade of the Falklands could create considerable hardships for the Islanders (which the Argentinians would no doubt seek to maximise): is that a politically acceptable contingency?
- (j) Is there a time limit upon the achievement of the main objective?

As soon as possible, obviously; but there may be a trade-off between time and other objectives, such as avoidance of failure or minimisation of casualties. Is it possible to indicate whether there is any overriding political objective in terms of time limit?

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