

MF
35
1

CONFIDENTIAL
Covering TOP SECRET



- Copy to:
- PS/Minister(AF)
- PS/US of S(AF)
- PSO/CDS
- PS/PUS
- DUS(Navy)
- ACNS(O)
- AUS(D Staff)
- AUS(NS)
- DNOT
- Head of DS5
- Head of DS11
- ACWS (POL)

MO 5/21

Sec 1SL

FALKLAND ISLANDS

Following the discussion which 1SL attended this morning I now attach a copy of a signal which the Secretary of State has sent to the Prime Minister in Brussels.

NHR/evans

29th March 1982

(N H R EVANS)
APS/S of S

Covering TOP SECRET
CONFIDENTIAL

TOP SECRET

Copy NO 13 of 13 34

SIGNAL TO THE PRIME MINISTER FROM SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE

I heard this morning that you had discussed the Falklands situation with the Foreign Secretary on your journey to Brussels. You asked for an urgent assessment of possible options for deployment of naval vessels to the Islands. I had already set contingency planning in hand over the weekend and a number of steps have been taken.

First, as Endurance may be required to remain at South Georgia for the foreseeable future and will begin to run short of food and other supplies in three weeks, the RFA Fort Austin has today sailed from Gibraltar to replenish Endurance. She will also be capable of providing support to other ships should they have to be sent to the area.

Secondly, I have today instructed that the nuclear submarine (SSN) HMS Spartan should be sailed covertly to the South Atlantic. She has been taken off exercises in the vicinity of Gibraltar and will proceed there to stock up with suitable weapons and provisions. She will sail from Gibraltar early on 31st March and should be in the vicinity of the Falklands by 13th April. This is the quickest available means of deploying an SSN, suitably equipped, to the area. We are planning on the basis that a second SSN will be earmarked.

A further possibility will be to divert to the South Atlantic seven destroyers/frigates currently participating in exercises off Gibraltar. They are due to leave for the UK on 1st April and their diversion would not become apparent before 5th April. There is time to take a decision on this later in the week. The ships could

TOP SECRET

reach the Falklands in 2/3 weeks and could, if necessary, take on a Royal Marines Company Group (150 strong), who would be flown out to Ascension Island, en route.

This Group would not in itself constitute a viable full strength task group. For this we would need at least a CVS, several escort vessels and a Royal Marines Commando Group (800 strong). Such a Force could be assembled in about a week and would take a further three to reach the Falklands. It would, of course, become immediately apparent that we were putting together such a group.

1. Plans
2. Ops (RMA)
3. Head of IS 3
4. Head of IS 11
5. RMA(1)

INTERNAL 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 CIB/COMINT. The possibility was addressed in following HMS BRANHAM in the longer term. This is being considered separately.

3. Ships could be diverted to exercises in the South Atlantic, albeit at penalty to their normal programmes: thus, option 2 would have implications for the conduct of the Gulf patrol and option 4 would mean effective cancellation of the major national exercise SPRINGHEAD.

4. Any exercises would, of course, have to be purely national. In present circumstances, no South American flag would be prepared to participate and it is probable that the USN would have a large number of ships which are disqualified for obvious reasons. The South Atlantic is an unusual place for the USN to exercise. There is no obvious characteristic which puts it at an advantage above the waters near home. Although, therefore, there might be some minor tactical/operational advantage in deploying ships for a declared purpose, unconnected with the