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PS/Minister(AF)
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Head of DS 11

MO 5/21

HEAD OF DS 5

FALKLAND ISLANDS: CHRONOLOGY

It will be helpful for the debate on Wednesday to have a chronology of the events leading up to the Falklands invasion. I have produced a first stab at this, which is attached. I should be grateful if you could confirm its accuracy, indicate where you feel that amendment is required and suggest any necessary additional material. It would, of course, be very helpful if you could find out whether the FCO are preparing anything similar and, if so, whether it is consistent with the attached.

NHR Evans

4th April 1982

(N H R EVANS)
APS/S of S

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CHRONOLOGY OF FALKLAND ISLANDS CRISISFALKLANDS/ARGENTINAWHITEHALL/MOD15th February

Foreign Secretary reports to Prime Minister that new Argentine Government is taking a tough line on sovereignty negotiations.

7th March

Prime Minister sees telegram from Buenos Aires.. This is a summary of an Argentinian news report. It speculates that if negotiations do not progress to Argentina's satisfaction, they would resort to "other means". Article discusses advantages of direct seizure of islands. This, it says, would be understood by the US. Such action could take place between middle and end of year. PM comments: "We must make contingency plans", and asks Foreign Secretary to cover this in OD paper which is being prepared by FCO.

8th March

PM asks S of S how quickly RN ships could deploy to Falklands at meeting on Anglo/German nuclear issues.

12th March

Minute sent to No 10 setting out timescale for ship deployments. Minute makes clear that ships could not reach the area within 20 days.

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FALKLANDS/ARGENTINAWHITEHALL/MOD19th March

British Antarctic Survey field party report that an Argentine Navy cargo vessel is anchored in Leith harbour. Party of about 60 Argentines have set up camp and Argentine flag has been hoisted.

20th March

BAS field party informs Argentines that they have landed illegally and that they must leave.

The Ministry of Defence instructs ENDURANCE to prepare to sail to South Georgia with a detachment of Marines from Port Stanley.

HM Ambassador Buenos Aires informs the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs that HMG treats infringement of sovereignty very seriously. Argentine Charge d'Affaires called into the Foreign Office and told the same. Argentine Government profess ignorance but agree to look into the matter urgently.

21st March

ENDURANCE departs for South Georgia.

Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs inform HMG that ship will leave South Georgia shortly and that no service personnel are involved.

19th March

More detailed note on MOD contingency planning, for inclusion in FCO paper, submitted to Secretary of State.

20th March

Resident Clerk receives flash signal from Port Stanley indicating that Governor wishes ENDURANCE to be deployed from Port Stanley to South Georgia in response to landing, instead of to Montevideo, to change RM detachment. She informs Mr Wiggin. Meanwhile No 10 speak to PS/S of S and indicate that PM wishes to be informed if we do not agree to the deployment. Deployment then cleared by S of S.

FAKELANDS/ARGENTINA

22nd March

We receive confirmation that Argentine ship has left but there are doubts about whether all the men have gone. In the evening BAS confirm that about 6 men and some equipment remain.

23rd March

ENDURANCE instructed to sail on for South Georgia and remove the men, if possible without using force.

Mr Luce makes a statement to the House of Commons.

Argentine Government later warns that use of ENDURANCE would be gravely provocative. They are told we wish to avoid this if possible: if they can propose an acceptable alternative method of removing the men we are prepared to let them do so.

24th March

ENDURANCE ordered to anchor in Grytviken harbour, but not to proceed to Leith.

Argentine MFA say they wish to prevent the situation escalating if possible, but need time to consider.

WHITEHALL/MOD

22nd March

S of S leaves for NPG at Colorado Springs.

23rd March

Mr Wiggin clears use of ENDURANCE to evict Argentinians.

24th March

Lord Carrington minutes S of S asking for separate circulation of contingency planning paper.

FALKLANDS/ARGENTINA25th March

Argentine naval vessel is sighted at Leith delivering further supplies.

We asked the Argentinians for an early response to our request that they remove the men.

Argentine MFA then say that by deploying HMS ENDURANCE we have made it impossible for them to contain their position. We reply that we wish to do everything possible to avoid confrontation and propose that, if the party requests the appropriate authorisation from Grytviken, it will be given.

WHITEHALL/MOD25th March

Mr Luce speaks to Mr Wiggin to say that he can only sell his statement on South Georgia (that Argentines should go to Grytviken, where they will be given clearances) if MOD give firm undertaking to run on ENDURANCE. Mr Wiggin (who has not been briefed) declines to do this.

26th March

Secretary of State returns from Colorado Springs and sees most recent papers. He speaks to Mr Wiggin on the telephone. They agree that ENDURANCE should stay on station and that RFA FORT AUSTIN should be sent to South Atlantic.

Secretary of State asks that the Naval Staff should earmark frigates which could be sent to the South Atlantic, should the need arise. He asks that FORT AUSTIN should be loaded, taking account of the possible need to sustain an enhanced naval presence in the South Atlantic.

Mr Wiggin replies to Lord Carrington on Secretary of State's behalf, agreeing to defer ENDURANCE's departure by up to two months. Also that the existing RM party should remain in the Falklands for the time being, doubling the strength of the garrison.

MOD contingency planning not circulated.

FALKLANDS/ARGENTINA27th March

No formal reply from the Argentine MFA. But they issue press statement announcing that the men will be given all necessary protection. Press reports that several Argentine Navy vessels have been ordered into the area.

28th March

Argentine Foreign Minister sends message to Lord Carrington making it clear they have no intention of agreeing to our proposal.

WHITEHALL/MOD27th March

Rumours of two corvettes in the area of Grytviken. Mr Wiggin pursues question of clearance for helicopter flights from ENDURANCE, which FCO have been reluctant to clear. Approval for air searches given late in the day.

28th March

Lord Carrington sends message to Mr Haig asking him to intervene and urge restraint on the Argentinians.

29th March

Secretary of State holds meeting with First Sea Lord. S of S authorises SSN (SPARTAN) to sail to South Atlantic. She returns to Gibraltar to be prepared for sailing on 31st March.

S of S signals Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary who are in Brussels for Common Market meeting (and who had discussed the situation on the aeroplane over) to inform them of this. He indicates that next possible deployment would be group of frigates; then full naval task group.

In the late afternoon intelligence is received that Argentinian submarine in the area of Stanley, possibly with the intention of blockading harbour or landing Marines.

Intelligence reported to Secretary of State. He also hears of disquiet on Government benches.

S of S commissions a note on options for airborne reinforcement of Falklands.

FALKLANDS/ARGENTINAWHITEHALL/MOD30th March

Over night Secretary of State authorises Duty Commander to send second SSN (SPLENDID). Order passed to prepare her for sailing on 2nd April.

Secretary of State visits Neston.

Foreign Secretary and Mr Blaker meet and agree to identify third SSN for sailing. Joint minute sent to Prime Minister reporting this and setting out options for frigate and task force deployment. Minute says that there is no sign that the Argentines are preparing to invade Falklands.

31st March

S of S at Warton. He asks for options for air defence of Falklands to be examined.

On his return he is briefed on latest intelligence. He is told of formation of Argentine task group and that there are indications that it will reach its destination at 0600 hours on 2nd April.

Secretary of State asks for meeting with the Prime Minister at her room at the House. Mr Luce, CNS, PUS, PS/S of S present. General discussion but no further firm decisions.

1st April

OD meeting.