

PUS

Copy to: DS17 (Mr Brennan)

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FALKLAND ISLANDS: NUCLEAR WEAPONS

1. I discussed with DS 17 today whether it would be useful to produce a paper which spelt out in rather more detail than we have done so far what might be the consequences of a successful attack, e.g. by Exocet, on one of the two carriers. I had in mind questions like:-
 - a. Was there any risk, however remote, of a major fire and explosion causing nuclear explosion?
 - b. Was there any risk, and how serious would it be, of emission of radio active material?
 - c. Quite apart from questions of moral responsibility, were we bound by any international obligations or treaties to declare a nuclear accident?
 - d. Who would be likely to know that we had nuclear weapons on board these two ships? The Americans? correspondents with the Task Force? the Russians? etc.
 - e. What were the problems involved in recovering the weapons if the ship sank in several hundred fathoms of water?
2. I think this work should be set in hand as a contingency, but at the same time it struck both DS 17 and myself that the attached signal from CTF 317 may conceivably provide us with a way out. The roulement of ships which CINCFLEET proposes, might present us with an opportunity to bring back the nuclear weapons from the Task Group. The RFAs FORT AUSTIN and RESOURCE are on the plot and both can carry nuclear weapons.
3. DS17 have at my request discussed this idea briefly with the Naval Staff. It seems that if it is decided that the weapons should be transferred from the carriers to these RFAs and then withdrawn to the UK, it could practically be done. The transfer might take 24 hours, although this would depend on the positions of the ships themselves and could involve penalties which would be regarded as operationally difficult, if not unacceptable, like the suspension of CAPs during unloading. All this would require further study.
4. From what DS17 tell me, there is little prospect of the Naval Staff being willing to recommend any move of this kind themselves. It is not hard to guess at the reasons. But it does seem to me that if we can bring this about it would remove at least one nightmare from this operation and we should take any chance we have to do so.
5. I wonder whether you might wish to float the idea with CDS and the Secretary of State yourself. Given our experience over Easter, we shall need a clear push from a high level if we are going to get anywhere with this.

J. M. Stewart

J M STEWART
AUS(DEFENCE STAFF)

25 May 1982

PS/PUS

Copy to:

AUS(D Staff)
DS17 (Mr Brennan)

This is to record that the Secretary of State discussed the contents of M1 above with CDS, PUS and CINCFLEET this evening. It was agreed that CDS would invite the CINC to draw up a plan along the lines of Paragraph 2 of M1. He would also explore other possibilities for removing the items in question. Admiral Fieldhouse did stress however that it would not be possible to implement such a plan straight away.

2. The Secretary of State would be happy for the work detailed in Paragraph 1 of M1 to be carried out provided that knowledge of the exercise really is restricted to a very few people indeed.

26th May 1982

(D B OMAND)
PS/S of S

(1) ~~AUS(D Staff)~~ ✓
DS17 (Mr Brennan) ✓
DS17 Spl. msg 2/11.

Please proceed accordingly

JWD
S. WEST

27 May 1982
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2 PUS

All is in hand. CDS should be minuting today. DS17 are meanwhile preparing an action plan to deal for the worst happening. um 3/11.

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FOR OMJ

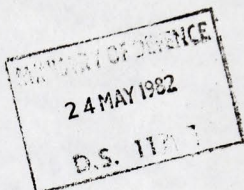
ROUTINE 232016Z MAY 82

FROM NODUK NAVY
TO NODUK
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CTF 317 19F/LDQ 231502Z MAY 82 PASSEP FOR INFO



PRIORITY/ROUTINE 231502Z MAY 82

FROM CTF 317
TO NODUK NAVY
INFO CTF 317.3

SECRET

SIC 19F/LDQ

OPERATION CORPORATE

A. CINCFLEET ACA/19F/LDQ/HQQ/WAW/NEF/NAJ 051500Z MAY 82 (ROULEMENT)

1. CURRENT INTENSIVE OPERATIONS AND A STEADILY DETERIORATING WEAPON SYSTEMS AVAILABILITY HAVE HIGHLIGHTED THE NEED TO IMPLEMENT THE ROULEMENT PLAN (REF A) AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

2. THE TIME HAS ALREADY ARRIVED WHEN, FOR MATERIAL AND PEOPLE REASONS IN VARYING PROPORTION:

A. UP TO 2 SSNS, 4 DD/FF, AND RFAS FORT AUSTIN, RESOURCE AND STORMNESS SHOULD BE WITHDRAWN TO UK.

B. 1 CVS, UP TO 5 DD/FF AND 1 AD SHOULD LEAVE TEZ AREA FOR MAINTENANCE/REST.

3. WHILE THESE WITHDRAWALS CAN CLEARLY NOT BE IMPLEMENTED AT THE PRESENT CRITICAL TIME, IT WILL VERY SOON BECOME ESSENTIAL TO

PROCEED WITH A PROPER ROULEMENT IF A MEDIUM TERM PRESENCE OF ANY SIGNIFICANCE IS TO BE MAINTAINED. AS THE LIKELIHOOD APPEARS TO GROW THAT REPOSSESSION/RETENTION OF THE F.I. WILL STRETCH WELL INTO THE FUTURE, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THE ARMY AND AIR DEPARTMENTS SHOULD REALISE THAT NAVAL FORCES IN THE AREA WILL INEVITABLY BE MARKEDLY REDUCED AND SHOULD PLAN ACCORDINGLY.

BT

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