

FALKLAND ISLANDS - MILITARY APPRECIATION

SCOPE OF PAPER

This paper reviews the military options, and their possible consequences, in support of Government policy to restore British Sovereignty to the Falkland Islands and their dependencies.

The principal factors affecting operations - the capability of the Argentine forces, the facilities we can obtain in the area, weather, intelligence, sustainability - are summarised. The military options, short and medium term, are identified and commented on. The paper finally reviews the effects of the operations upon our NATO commitments; and the force levels needed to occupy and defend the Falklands once regained. Further detail on all these points is contained in the Annexes.

FACTORS AFFECTING OPERATIONS

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The Argentinian Navy is the most effective in South America, and has 9 ships fitted with modern missiles. However most units are elderly. It would not be a match for a modern Western force, and is particularly vulnerable to SSNs. Their Army is an effective force, high in morale, but weak in artillery, air defence, and logistics. They have a large Air Force, including 35 modern Mirage aircraft, but they will not be very effective at the range of the Falkland Islands, particularly against well defended ships. Nevertheless, if the Argentinian occupation force builds up its strength uninterrupted, it will not be easy to dislodge.

The remoteness of the Falklands from the UK highlights the importance of forward operating and support facilities for air forces. There are indications that Chile might help; a request has been made for assistance with refuelling, and for the basing of Nimrod aircraft, whose reconnaissance would be a powerful

orce multiplier for our SSNs and the surface task group. The Chilean response will be a key factor, since other South American countries are either supporting or expected to support the Argentinian action.

The military operations under review can be sustained - with POL, food, water, armaments, stores and medical facilities although the long and difficult LOC will pose many problems. The existing facilities on Ascension Island are meagre but could be made to serve with detailed pre planning. However Ascension Island could not offer an adequate warship maintenance and repair capability. The longer the deployment and the greater the number of ships, the more valuable it would be to have access to the facilities at Simonstown in South Africa.

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The weather conditions in the Falkland Islands area from March to May are like those in Europe in late Autumn. Seas will often be rough and winds strong, but overall maritime operations will not be impeded. Ashore there are almost no roads and the terrain is very difficult, so that defensive reaction to a surprise landing is likely to be slow. Operations are, however, expected to be possible by appropriately winter trained and equipped forces year round.

Finally, a cardinal factor affecting operations will be the need to avoid, as far as possible, heavy fighting in the Port Stanley area. Severe loss of life among the small population, and widespread property destruction, would defeat the operation's objective.

MILITARY OPTIONS

11-27 Apr 72

The Short Term Options available to the SSNs before the arrival of the Surface Task Force are seen as:

Cutting the Argentine Sea LOC to the Falklands. In an ultimatum, we could declare an Exclusion Zone of - say - 200 miles around the Falklands. In this Zone, Argentine warships and military support vessels would be sunk without warning. Enforcement of the zone could commence with the arrival of the first SSN. This action would demonstrate our political will and could result in the sinking of major Argentinian warships; it would in any event inhibit the further build up of Argentinian forces on the Falklands. This action would be essential to the success of any later landing, but could also be a self contained and effective action on its own.

General Operations against the Argentine Navy. SSNs would be employed to seek out and destroy Argentine warships. Success would depend on Argentinian willingness to keep their warships at sea. These operations would be more effective with the help of maritime air surveillance. The sinking of several major warships would be a dramatic demonstration of our naval capability, and could have a profound effect on public perceptions in Argentina of the Falkland crisis, and so on the domestic position of the Argentinian Government. However, such operations could take time to bear fruit, during which SSNs would not be able to interdict the reinforcement and resupply of the Argentinian garrison on the Falklands.

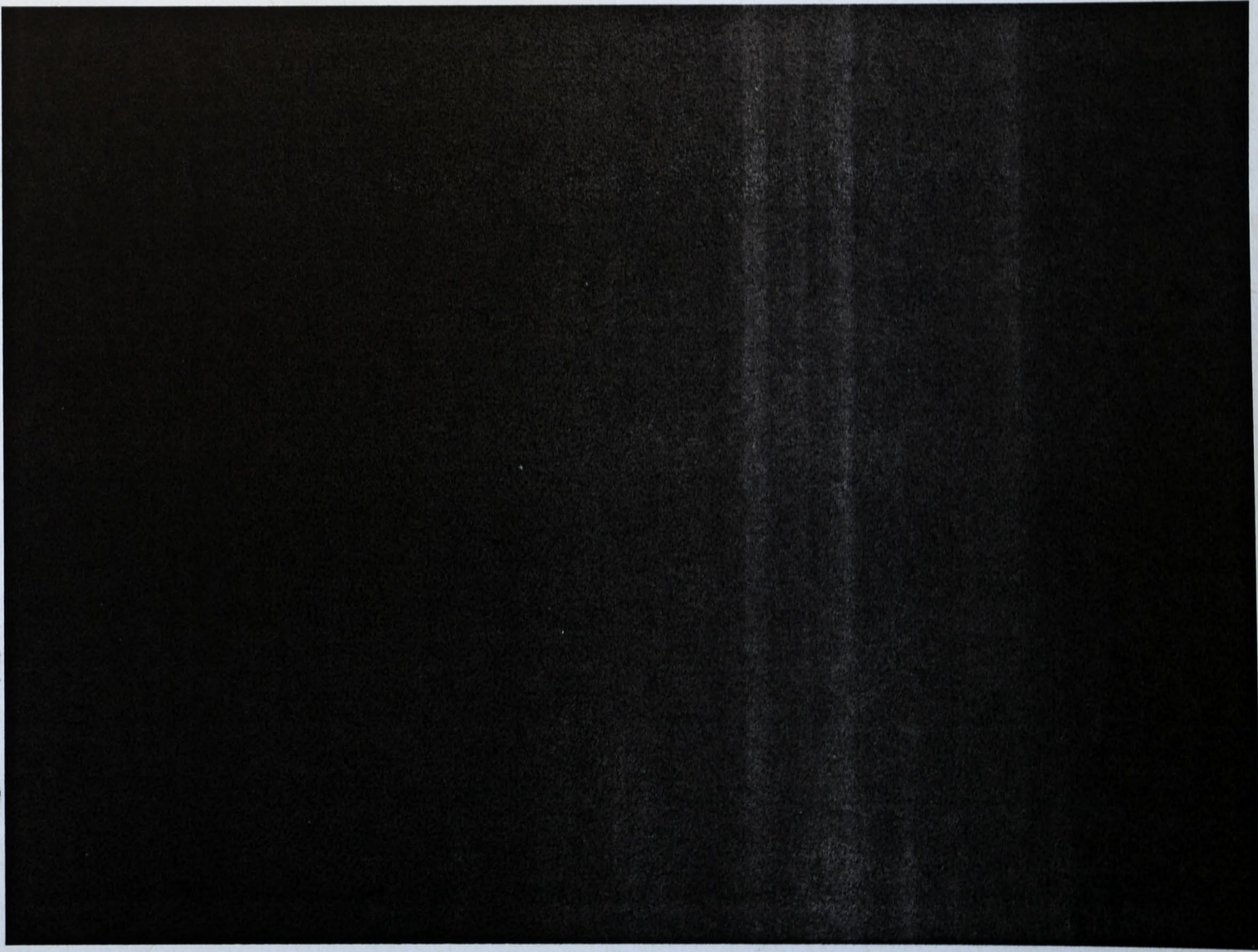
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Blockade of Argentinian Ports. If Argentinian warships had been withdrawn to port, SSNs could be employed to blockade them there. However, action directed at the mainland of Argentina would be perceived as more escalatory than action focussed on the Falklands, and the SSNs could not blockade all the naval ports open to the Argentine Navy.

Unrestricted anti shipping Operations. SSNs could attack without warning any Argentine shipping, warship or merchant, whether connected with Falkland Islands reinforcement or not. This would be a major escalation. It might unwittingly involve neutrals. Propaganda Claims could be made about casualties to women and children. It is probably more suited to a long war of attrition.

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practice the effectiveness, and time taken, would be uncertain. It would also expose our forces to a higher level of risk in proximity to the mainland, as well as having political implications in the possible enlargement of the conflict.

Power Projection against Mainland Shore Targets. This

option could be directed against Argentine military infrastructure or civil targets, by Sea Harriers or bombardment. The risks to our own forces are great, the rewards doubtful, and the political consequences fraught.

Offensive Maritime Operations. The objective would be to seek out and destroy the Argentine Navy on the high seas. We have sufficient forces to achieve this. It would be contingent on the Argentine Navy being at sea, and chances of success would be enhanced by air reconnaissance. Depending on the opportunities presented, it could precede, be concurrent with, or follow the Sea and Air Control option. The rewards would be great - destruction of their Fleet would eliminate the threat of further invasion of the Falklands for some years following our re-occupation. It might conceivably be so devastating a blow to the Argentine regime that they withdrew from the Falklands.

Conduct of Landing Operations. This ultimate option depends on sea and air control around the Falklands. It will be affected by the success or otherwise of our earlier operations against the Falkland LOC. It will depend on good intelligence. Subject to all these, the flexibility of the amphibious force

should enable a surprise landing to be conducted in a lightly defended area. The terrain would probably preclude any immediate Argentine response, and a viable bridgehead should be possible. This is unlikely to be in the vicinity of Port Stanley.

Such a landing could lead to our control of part of the Falklands, possibly the West Falklands. In political terms this might constitute a stage, whereby control of the Falklands was now seen to be disputed, giving possibilities for negotiations.

The final stage would be the progressive re-occupation of the Islands - probably feasible if our sea and air control was absolute, but a slow business in the Antarctic winter and in terrain favouring the defender. The potential effect on the civilian population and infrastructure would inhibit operations. The use of helicopters for rapid response and outflanking manoeuvres would be a dominant feature. Neither the scenario or the outcome of this final phase can be predicted with certainty.

OTHER OPTIONS.

Mining. This has been considered, but the wide international implications of using so indiscriminate a weapon weigh against it. Also, our mines are few and of outdated technology. It is possible and potentially effective to declare a minefield when there is none, but again the diplomatic repercussions (Soviet fishing fleet) could be far reaching.

Special Operations from SSNs. The military worth of operations by a Special Boat Section from a submarine are well established. Unfortunately it needs calm weather conditions; also an SSN is ill suited to them, as it takes 7 minutes to dive. The gains of a special operations whether against the Argentine mainland or the Falklands would have to outweigh the very real risk to the SSN.

Evacuation of Civilians. It might be an option to seek early evacuation of the civilian Falklands population by the Red Cross. The final phase of our operations would thus be freed from some serious problems. The Argentine Government might of course refuse, but in that case would have to bear the odium of being seen to hold the population hostage. However, our action in requesting an evacuation could be misrepresented and misunderstood publicly.

Military Occupation. Following a successful re-occupation of the Falklands, we might have to defend them against a bitter and hostile Argentine. Assuming the Argentine Navy had been largely neutralised and their Army and Air Force severely reduced, an initial estimate of our required force level is 2 frigates or destroyers, an RM Commando Group, Rapier anti air defences, 4 - 6 Harrier a/c, 6 - 8 support helos, and supporting elements. The Falkland Islands population would virtually be doubled. The runway at Port Stanley airfield would need to be upgraded. If the Argentine withdrawal had taken place with their sea and air forces largely intact, the force levels required would be much greater.

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West Falkland

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Effect of Falkland Islands Operations on UK NATO Commitments.

Planned deployments to Operation CORPORATE will severely effect the UK contribution to NATO. There will be about a 50% reduction in our ship Category A1 readiness declarations; 3 RM Cdo Brigade would be at a lower NATO readiness standard; one half of the afloat war reserve stock of ammunition would go out of area in the first 20 days. The greater part of the Air Transport Force would be involved, and the readiness downgrading of 4 Nimrods would be significant with so many of the aircraft already at lower status for conversions. Implementation of NATO reinforcement plans, if called upon during or shortly after CORPORATE, would be protracted. The effect on Army commitments to NATO would be slight, as the principal unit (5 INF BDE) is not declared. Considering NATO exercises, Distant Drum 82, Damsel Fair and Open Gate would all be affected before June.

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