

Private Secretary

cc: PS/PUS

FALKLANDS: MILITARY PLAN

1. The first meeting of the South Atlantic Sub Committee of OD is taking place at 9 am tomorrow, 7 April.
2. I understand that there may be three papers for possible discussion:-

(a) A minute by Sir R Armstrong setting out some of the difficult questions which have to be addressed in connection with the Falklands operation. We have seen this in draft and Mr Weston will be preparing a brief on it. The final version may only be received late tonight from Sir R Armstrong's office.

(b) A short, top secret and very restricted paper by the Defence Secretary with the first outline of a possible plan. This too may be received fairly late. I describe my understanding of it in paragraph 4 below.

(c) A longer paper on military options and SSN rules of engagement. Mr Weston has commented on this and I will be submitting it separately.

3. It seems to me unlikely that all these papers can be discussed in the time available. It may be best to have a general discussion on (a) and then turn to (b) and (c). The Ministry of Defence and the Chiefs of Staff clearly require firm decisions before too long but they are forcing the pace.

4. As regards 2(b) - the plan of operations - the proposal is as follows, but subject of course to a prior political decision that Argentinian warships should be sunk.

Stage 1 An SSN would sink the first Argentinian warship which it came across. (this would happen any time after 11 April). The cover story would be that this was in self-defence since the submarine believed that it had been detected and was about to be attacked. The purpose of this would be to indicate in unmistakable fashion that British submarines had arrived in the area.

/Stage 2

Stage 2 After an agreed period thereafter, perhaps 24 or 48 hours, a 200 mile zone of exclusion would be established and announced and any Argentinian warships coming into it would be sunk.

Stage 3 After the arrival of the faster part of the task force auxiliary Argentinian shipping or merchant ships supplying the Falklands would be turned back from entering the zone or, if they persisted, would presumably be sunk. Similarly aircraft supplying the Falklands would be shot down.

As part of Stage 3 two frigates, plus HMS Endurance, would be detached to re-occupy South Georgia. The presence of Endurance might be necessary as an ice-breaker in order to make a passage for the frigates.

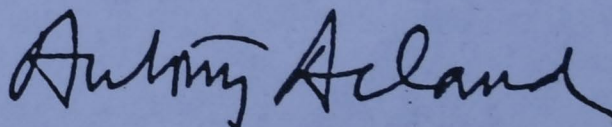
The next stage, which would require very careful consideration, would be a landing on the Falklands. This is after calling up the slower ships in the task force on which Marines and assault troops would be assembled. The nature of the landing would depend on intelligence available and if the Argentinians have reinforced to 7-8,000 troops could be very difficult, although West Falklands might be a possible target.

5. Comment.

(a) The essential prior matter for consideration is when we consider it to be to our best advantage to embark on warlike activity. If we do it too early and before we have been seen to exhaust all possible diplomatic initiatives will we lose a great deal of international support? We would certainly be taken to the UN on the sinking of the first Argentinian warship. Some countries providing staging, fuelling or other facilities might well desist. I think that there are considerable international dangers in taking military action too early.

(b) The Legal Adviser would be unhappy about Stage 1 above unless there had been a special public statement shortly before the event re-emphasising our determination to use all necessary measures in exercise of our right of self-defence in respect of the Falklands.

(c) The recapture of South Georgia seems quite a good tactic provided that it can be achieved (and held) with the onset of winter and extremely icy conditions. The Argentinians also have an ice-breaker which might be able to lead one of their corvettes to the area.



Antony Acland

6 April 1982