

ALQ 062/3

5 AUG 1982


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Mr. Weston  
Defence Dept.

PLAN FOR OPERATION SUTTON

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The main part of this morning's meeting of the Chiefs of Staff consisted of a discussion of the attached Outline Plan prepared by CINCFLEET for the amphibious landing operation on the Falkland Islands (Operation Sutton).

2. As you will see, CINCFLEET has confirmed the point made by the Chief of Naval Staff in yesterday's Chiefs of Staff meeting that the preferred landing date for Operation Sutton is 16 May, but that a landing could take place at any point between 14-23 May. This is on the assumption that air and sea superiority would have been achieved in the Maritime Exclusion Zone, particularly at its eastward end. Most importantly, it is based on the assumption that the airfield at Port Stanley would already have been put out of operation.

3. The following points were made in the course of discussion. The Chief of Naval Staff emphasised the importance of launching Vulcan attacks on the airfield as soon as possible after 29 April, in order to deny the enemy the use of the airfield, to make the best use of the facilities available to us, and to keep Sea Harriers in reserve for the landing operation. On the question of putting in reconnaissance parties, the CNS emphasised the difficulty of removing them after reconnaissance had been completed. On the possible threat from Argentine mines, the CNS said that there was little we could do. On this last point, the naval representative of CINCFLEET said that the plan had been drawn up on the assumption of low probability for the Argentines to carry out successful mining operations although it was agreed that such a possibility existed. The initial debriefing of the Marines suggested that some landmining might have been carried out across the access routes to Port Stanley.

4. The Chief of Air Staff said that the RAF were working up the Vulcans and should be able to report on their capability with thousand pound bombs within a few days. He did not know how successful they would be (I gathered that Vulcans have not practised with this type of bomb for some time) and there was a risk of some civilian casualties. He was asked to submit a report to the Chiefs of Staff by 25 April.

5. The CAS also pointed out that the plan contained very little reference to air reconnaissance or to offensive air capability, and particularly regretted the absence of any reference to Sea Harrier in paragraphs 6 and 17. He also said that there was inadequate reference in the plan to our eventual aim of repossessing the Falkland Islands. He also wondered

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whether we could guarantee the maintenance of the Exclusion Zone if the Argentine Navy remained intact.

6. In further discussion, the Chief of Defence Staff said that Ministers were likely to be very concerned about the risk of civilian casualties. He also asked whether the capability of the Sea Harrier had been underrated but was told that the plan had been drawn up on the assumption that Sea Harriers should be preserved for sea defence. Very high intensive flying rates were envisaged for a period of one month, and alternative sources of air reconnaissance existed.

7. On the question of maintaining the Maritime Exclusion Zone, CDS commented that we had succeeded in doing so so far by means of submarine cover. If the airfield could be knocked out, we would effectively have achieved an Air Exclusion Zone (the CNS commented that this would also depend on the Rules of Engagement, and expressed the hope that there would be no pussyfooting over these). The Air Force representative of CINCFLEET commented that air cover for the land forces would be increasingly difficult as one went westward; for this reason, the idea of a landing on the West Falklands had been dismissed.

8. The Vice-Chief of General Staff said that the Army should be able to play a role in sterilising the airfield (and revealed that Mr. Haig had this morning given authority for the release of STINGER). He said that, if necessary, a further SAS group could be inserted well in advance of the landing operation. He also echoed the Chief of Air Staff's comment on the lack of any reference to repossessing the Falklands after the initial landing operation. CINCFLEET's representative commented that this had not been included in their planning requirements, but that work on this aspect was now going ahead. The CDS said that he thought Ministers would want more guidance on the difficulties of repossessing the Falklands before agreeing to any landing operation. The CNS pointed out that it would be difficult to draw up any precise plan for the second phase of the operation in advance of the necessary reconnaissance.

9. Sir F. Cooper said that his main worry was about timing. The plan envisaged a carefully gradated timetable, running from 29 April through to July. This, perhaps inevitably, took very little account of unpredictable events, including international reactions to the first use of force. He thought that Ministers would need to consider the options more clearly, and that further work on this was perhaps required from the Chiefs of Staff. The CDS agreed that Ministers would need to receive advice on the timing options, based on CINCFLEET's plan, and asked ACDS(OPS) to prepare a draft for consideration by the Chiefs of Staff tomorrow.

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10. I limited my comment to endorsing the CDS's comments about Ministerial concern over civilian casualties, and Sir F. Cooper's remarks about the unpredictability of international reactions.

11. Finally, you will see that the plan (paragraph 42) refers to the issue of instructions for handling prisoners of war. Have we received any further drafts from the Ministry of Defence on this?

(P.R.H. Wright)  
20 April, 1982.

cc PS/PUS )  
Mr. Gillmore ) without enclosure

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