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D/DS17/5/6/1

PS/Minister(DP)

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✓ APS/S of S (Mr Piper)

PQ4739C FROM LORD JENKINS OF PUTNEY

We are submitting separately to you the PQ folder on this PQ. This minute gives some more highly classified background to the position.

2. Certain of HM Ships in the Task Group are carrying nuclear depth bombs for use by RN aircraft. This is a customary aspect of their peacetime weapon stocks. In the light of potential political and other problems, including our obligations under the Treaty of Tlatelolco (see background note in the PQ folder), Ministers directed the MOD to examine whether it would be possible to remove the weapons - for example by offloading them at Ascension Island and returning them to the UK by air. The MOD study concluded that this latter course would be practicable, albeit with some increased safety risk. The main problem was that the operation of taking the weapons off at Ascension Island would delay the planned deployment of the Task Group by some 36 hours. In the light of this advice, Ministers decided that the weapons should remain on board.

3. Ministers further decided that:

(a) In response to questioning on the subject, we had no option but to maintain our policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence or absence of nuclear weapons at any particular place at any particular time;

(b) Ministers could, however, make it clear that we had no intention of using nuclear weapons in this dispute;

(c) That HM Ships carrying nuclear weapons should not enter the territorial waters (ie. 3 mile limit) of the Falkland Islands or their dependencies. We could therefore state in public that we were abiding by our obligations under the Treaty of Tlatelolco (although this would, by inference, involve a slight departure from the "neither confirm nor deny" policy).

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D. Brennan

21 April 1982

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