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*D H Gillmore* (312)  
*Cheney*



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*JH 30/4*

Private Secretary

OD(SA) MEETING ON 29 APRIL: MILITARY ISSUES

1. I submit briefs on the military issues which we understand are likely to be discussed at OD(SA) tomorrow:
  - a. the despatch of the amphibious force from Ascension;
  - b. the addition of another brigade to the amphibious force and the consequent requirement to requisition more merchant ships;
  - c. the introduction into the Falkland Islands of special forces (SAS/SBS).

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28 April 1982

cc:

PS/PUS  
Mr Wright

*Pa*

*JH 10/5*

DESPATCH OF  
AMPHIBIOUS FORCE  
Points to make

THE DESPATCH OF THE AMPHIBIOUS FORCE FROM ASCENSION

POINTS TO MAKE

1. A decision to despatch the force should be delayed for a minimum of 48 hours.
2. This will not give wrong signals to Argentines. Plenty of other actions (TEZ and possible air attack on Stanley airport) will convince them of our seriousness.
3. Must not let military actions be driven by media expectations of imminent invasion.
4. No plan has been agreed for the use of these amphibious forces. Pointless to agree their despatch before we know what to do with them.
5. Worse still, we impose on ourselves artificial deadline; in a few weeks time we shall have to decide whether to use them for landing or return them to Ascension. It could turn out that neither option is attractive.
6. Better to delay decision until we have clear plan, even at expense of losing a couple of days or so.

THE DESPATCH OF THE AMPHIBIOUS FORCE FROM ASCENSION

ESSENTIAL FACTS

1. The amphibious force is at present at Ascension Island. The MOD consider that a decision is necessary by 10.00 hours on 29 April to give orders for the embarkation and despatch of this force in the direction of the Falkland Islands.
2. The reasons for the MOD's wish for an immediate decision appear to be as follows:
  - a. every day lost in reaching a decision on the despatch of the amphibious force will mean that the 'window' for their use in an amphibious landing on the Falkland Islands will be reduced by one day;
  - b. the media are expecting the disembarkation of the British forces on the Falkland Islands imminently. Unless there is action to make this possible, public expectations will be dashed;
  - c. failure to take a decision now would give the wrong signal to the Argentines. The latter have a merchant ship patrolling in the Ascension Island area and are well aware of movements of forces from the Island.
3. None of these arguments is compelling. Taking them in the order set out above,
  - a. it is not necessarily true that we shall narrow the 'window' of opportunity for an assault landing if we delay a decision (eg for a further 48 hours) on whether or not to despatch the force from Ascension Island. We would merely delay the date at which these forces could be disembarked on the Falkland Islands.

- b. Expectations artificially built up in the media must not drive us to precipitate decisions on military action.
  - c. It is doubtful whether a decision not to despatch the force would give the wrong signal to the Argentines at a time when we have just announced the imminent implementation of a Total Exclusion Zone and may be authorising the bombing of Stanley airport.
4. There are however two even more compelling arguments against an immediate decision to despatch the amphibious force. These are:

- a. if we despatch the force now it will have to be 'used' for an assault within a maximum of about 6 weeks (troops cannot be kept at sea for longer). The alternative would be to bring them back to Ascension Island. We are thus creating for ourselves a watershed in the near future. Six weeks hence we shall face strong arguments that the amphibious force must be launched because not to take this action would be to give a wrong signal to the Argentines (cf paragraph 3 c. above).
- b. We have no sensible plan yet for the reoccupation of the Falkland Islands. Drafts have been discussed in the Chiefs of Staff Committee. It is evident from these discussions that the CGS, for example, has grave doubts about the military feasibility of what has been proposed so far. We believe Mr Nott may share these doubts. It would be senseless to agree on the despatch of the

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amphibious force before we knew what we were going to do with them or indeed whether any military plan involving their use was really feasible.

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POSSIBLE MOBILISATION  
OF FURTHER INFANTRY  
Points to make

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BRIEF FOR ODSA

POSSIBLE MOBILISATION OF A FURTHER INFANTRY BRIGADE

LINE TO TAKE

1. Makes little sense to go on adding large reinforcement capability till we have clear idea of our aim in terms of military options. No decision by Ministers yet on principle or timing of large-scale amphibious landing. Even military feasibility of this still in question. Does Chief of General Staff support it? No need for decision on further brigade at this stage.

ESSENTIAL FACTS

2. CDS mentioned at the meeting held by Sir Robert Armstrong on the afternoon of 28 April the possibility that a further infantry brigade would now need to be mobilised for the Falklands effort. With 3 Commando Brigades, 3 Para and 2 Para already involved, we have a total of some 6,500 ground troops ~~involved~~ <sup>in play</sup>. But Ministers have still not sorted out the preferred military options after the implementation of a TEZ. As briefing for Chequers last week made clear, there are doubts (shared by some of the military) about Operation Sutton. We do not even know at this stage whether to send the amphibious force from Ascension Island, still less whether that force will need reinforcing or replacing months hence. Moving a further infantry brigade would require requisitioning the QE II. There is even talk in the MOD of asking European Community partners to let us requisition some of their civil shipping.

3. We should not allow haphazard decisions and unrefined military logic to drive HMG's overall strategy in this way.

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