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FALKLAND ISLANDS - LANDING OPERATIONS

In accordance with the instructions of the Chiefs of Staff (1), the attached paper, prepared by ACDS(Pol), will be tabled for consideration by the Chiefs of Staff at their meeting at 1100 hours today, Thursday 29 April 1982.

Attachment:

Falkland Islands - Landing Operations(5 pages).

Note:

1. COS 34th Mtg/82, Item 1.

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FALKLAND ISLANDS - LANDING OPERATIONSINTRODUCTION

1. The planning of Operation SUTTON has reached a stage in its development where Ministers may like to take stock of the aim of the operation and the military factors affecting it.

OPERATION SUTTON - PLANNING

2. The Chiefs of Staff have a responsibility to propose military action which will establish the conditions for an Argentine withdrawal from the Falkland Islands, and the re-establishment of British administration. The planning directive given to the Commander-in-Chief Fleet was "To land a force in the Falkland Islands, with a view to repossessing the Islands".

3. Having produced an Outline Plan, and taking account of current intelligence of a 7-8,000 strong Argentine garrison, the Commander-in-Chief Fleet concludes that he requires a minimum force level increase of a Brigade. The 5 battalions presently allocated will suffice only to establish a beachhead, and leave no margin for set backs in the adverse conditions, and no reserves nearer than 8,000 miles. At the end of a long logistic pipeline the force cannot afford to get bogged down in protracted operations. The only prudent course is to plan for a short, sharp, decisive campaign. The extra Brigade will only give a small margin of superiority to achieve this.

4. The Chiefs of Staff consider that the 5 battalions presently assigned to Operation SUTTON should achieve a secure bridgehead, and some further advance inland. Eventually the force could meet Argentine forces established in strength in prepared defensive positions in and around Port Stanley. Given the limitation of keeping civilian casualties to a minimum, there could be a siege or stalemate position, with time not on our side.

5. The Chiefs of Staff agree that, if the Commander-in-Chief Fleet is to achieve a quick and complete military repossession of the Falklands, another Brigade is certainly needed. This is trained and ready. Timing is critical, and there is a limit to available British Flag shipping. Requisitioning would have to start very soon, and could include the QE2, which is available only until 4 May, and thereafter from 19 May.

MILITARY OPTIONS

6. The Chiefs of Staff have considered the need for additional forces in the context of the principal military options and their possible outcomes.

7. Total Exclusion Zone (TEZ). Full scale enforcement of the 200 mile exclusion zone around the Falklands, by sea and air, is about to be undertaken by the Task Force. To maximise pressure on Argentine Forces, it should include a softening up by a steady attrition - including air attacks on Port Stanley airfield - and SAS/SBS attacks against Argentine personnel and military installations.

a condition for later landing operations, this phase should extend to action against Argentine naval forces, at the least the neutralisation of the carrier and submarines. The combined effect of all these actions could be enough to achieve the HMG's objectives, although it is by no means certain. In any case the TEZ is a necessary precursor to any further option.

8. Operation SUTTON. After some weeks of the TEZ, Argentine morale and effectiveness might so decline that conditions were ripe for a quick and successful landing operation. Following the cutting of their lines of communication and the effective harassment of their garrison, Argentine resistance around Port Stanley might crumble; or the political will in Buenos Aires fail.

9. However, a quick success cannot be taken for granted. There is a danger that the force could find, after a successful landing and a secure bridgehead, that 4 or so battalions were dug in and resisting around Port Stanley. As argued by the Commander-in-Chief Fleet, the force might well be insufficient for an all out assault, and it might come under intense attack from air and sea forces which had been husbanded. If it came to a siege, the advancing winter and the 8,000 mile logistic chain would be against us. The Argentine forces could be portrayed as the gaolers of Port Stanley, whilst we were in possession of most of the Islands; this might or might not create the conditions for a negotiated settlement.

10. Operation SUTTON Reinforced. If the force were augmented by an extra brigade, it would give us a slight margin of superiority in troops - perhaps enough, given earlier attrition of Argentine forces, to inflict a total defeat. Fighting could be heavy and casualties high. It would add very significantly to our logistic problems. This would be perceived as a major change in the scale of the operation and our commitment, and there must be some doubt whether national and international support would hold up. An alternative worth considering, which might not have this consequence, would be to exert increasing sea and air pressure in support of the landing.

11. Blockade. If a landing were not attempted, it might still be possible to maintain military pressure through effectively cutting the sea/air lines of communication to the Falkland Islands. Our naval force levels would have to be reduced to be kept up over the long haul. Time and weather would take a further toll, particularly of our Harriers and helicopter capability. The strain imposed on the Argentine garrison would be severe, and might impose a solution; but the logistic as well as international strains on our own forces might be no less severe, with the eventual result uncertain.

12. Summary. The foregoing options are directed towards the conditions for an Argentine withdrawal from the Falkland Islands. Commander-in-Chief Fleet's landing operation has so far been planned 'with a view to repossession' of the Falklands. We judge that he can attempt it with present forces, but there would be

danger of a military stalemate on the Islands. On the one hand this might create the conditions for a negotiated settlement; on the other hand time would be against us if we have to undertake protracted military operations. If these courses of action are judged unsatisfactory, the Commander-in-Chief Fleet considers and the Chiefs of Staff agree that he needs an extra Brigade for a quick military solution. In addition, the Chiefs of Staff believe he would need air reinforcements, and authority to neutralise the more important elements of the Argentine Fleet. Ministerial review of the position is necessary at this point.