

TOP SECRET AND PERSONAL

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Ref. A07995

Prime Minister

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MR. COLES

The conclusion is that we cannot produce intelligence information in time for a meeting of the U.S. Security Council.

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Falkland Islands: Security Council

Sir Anthony Parsons's telegram no. 343 emphasised that, if we proposed to call a meeting of the Security Council to deter an Argentine military threat to the Falkland Islands, we must be able to produce absolutely convincing evidence in public of a genuine and immediate threat of invasion.

2. In that connection you asked me to provide you with answers to two questions:

- (1) Could the United States provide us with intelligence material of a kind that would be convincing evidence, which we could publicly use in the Security Council?
- (2) Was there anything we could do from our own intelligence resources to produce such evidence which could be publicly used?
3. The Intelligence Co-ordinator and I have discussed this with the Director of GCHQ and DCDS(1), Ministry of Defence, and the Chairman of the JIC.
4. The short answer to the first question is that the Ministry of Defence have been in contact with their American counterparts about the possibility of making "imagery" - photographic evidence from satellite coverage - available, and that it is not technically possible for them to provide us with such imagery in the sort of timescale we should require it. There are only two satellites in orbit which are capable of producing immediate "read-out" imagery. Both are in fixed orbits related to each other and to a relay satellite. The orbits are related to Northern hemisphere coverage. They could not be diverted in under seven or eight days. The penalty of diversion would be loss of existing coverage, which would no doubt be the more unwelcome to the United States authorities the longer it lasted. Our own technical advisers confirm that it would not be possible to divert the orbits in a shorter period of time.
5. We have no aircraft in the region of the Falkland Islands that could provide aerial photographic coverage. It would be technically possible for a Nimrod to cover the area, operating out of a Chilean airfield. There has been

TOP SECRET AND PERSONAL

no approach to the Chilean Government to suggest this. Though the Chilean press have been rather supportive of our position in the dispute with Argentina, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office think it unlikely that the Chilean Government would allow us to use Chilean facilities. There would also be the problem of avoiding Argentine airspace.

6. It is an additional disadvantage of photographic coverage, whether by satellite or by aircraft, that, while it would provide information about the whereabouts of the Argentine naval squadron and of the nature of the ships making it up, it would almost certainly not provide definite indications of intention.

7. We have also considered the possibility of using SIGINT material. Most of the relevant SIGINT material - material of sufficient precision for this purpose - is intercepted Argentine naval traffic. The public use of such material would demonstrate to the Argentines that we had access to the traffic. Immediately, it would cause them to reduce their communications to a minimum, and would therefore cost us future intelligence from this source. In the longer term, it would show that we had broken their cipher system, and this might lead them to replace their present equipment. This again would lead to loss of coverage, and not just of Argentinian naval traffic: the system used by the Argentinians is used by other countries' military and diplomatic traffic, and if they discovered that the Argentinians were replacing the system those countries might think it prudent to follow suit. Nor is it just our intelligence which would be put at risk: the Americans would also lose their intelligence on this traffic, and at most times their interest in Argentinian naval intelligence is greater than ours.

8. Finally, we have considered whether there would be any means of covering the public use of SIGINT material by means (for example) of a bogus "human" intelligence report. This would in any case be an unconvincing operation, given that what we are trying to cover is in the middle of the ocean. I am advised that, if we tried this sort of operation, we should be in danger of risking the valuable intelligence sources we still have in Argentina.

9. I am afraid that the conclusion has to be that there is no possibility of producing intelligence material which could be used as supporting evidence at a meeting of the Security Council.

10. Sir Anthony Parsons is standing by to receive instructions as to whether he should seek to call a meeting of the Security Council. Unless the Prime Minister prefers to wait until she can discuss this with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary on his return later this evening, it is for consideration whether ~~some~~ kind of instruction should be sent to Sir Anthony Parsons to stand him down. For the present, his instructions are that Ministers are still considering whether to call a meeting of the Security Council.

11. I am sending a copy of this minute to the Private Secretary to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary.

ReA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

1st April, 1982

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7/6

10 DOWNING STREET

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From the Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

FALKLAND ISLANDS: SECURITY COUNCIL

The Prime Minister was grateful for your minute of 1 April. She has noted the conclusion, namely that we cannot produce intelligence information in time for a meeting of the UN Security Council on the Falklands issue.

I am copying this minute to Brian Fall (FCO).

A J. COLES

2 April 1982