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ARGENTINE/OWN FORCES CAPABILITIES -  
PRESENTATION TO ODSA - 15 APRIL 1982

1. At the Briefings for OD(SA) (1) on Thursday 15 April, DCDS(I) and ACDS(Ops) gave presentations on the capabilities of the Argentine Armed Forces and on our own Force Dispositions and Military Options.

2. A copy of the scripts of the presentations are attached for your information.

Attachments:

1. Argentine Armed Forces Capabilities (9 pages).
2. Force Dispositions and Military Options (5 pages).

Note:

1. OD(SA) (82) 7th Meeting, 15 April 1982.

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COSSEC 10 - 14

ARGENTINE ARMED FORCES CAPABILITIES - PRESENTATION TO ODSA -  
15 APRIL 1982 - BY DCDS(I)INTRODUCTION

1. The Argentine's military capability owes its origins and its equipment to three countries - primarily the United States and France, but also to the United Kingdom.
2. Superficially, both in quantity and quality, their forces are impressive. But they are not all they seem. Professionalism is patchy, serviceability is low, spares are short and training is limited. They have not seen active service for 110 years. On the other hand, they are elated by what they see as a victory. Morale stands high - but it could crumble. General Menendez may already be starting to feel the first pangs of being isolated. In sum, the Argentine armed forces probably mirror the bravura and the impetuosity of Galtieri himself - a cavalryman.
3. I will, if I may:
  - a. Assess the capability of each service in turn - against the Forces we pose against them;
  - b. Discuss the overall strengths and weaknesses of the Argentine's military position;
  - c. Finally, draw some conclusions.

NAVY

4. The principal units are:
  - a. The Carrier 25 de Mayo - ex British, 37 years old but still the pride of the fleet. She has had engine trouble but sailed on Tuesday.

- b. The cruiser BELSRANO - ex-US 44 years old - of doubtful reliability but she too could be ready for sea;
  - c. 8 x destroyers - a mix of 2 modern British type 42s and 6 old American ships of which 3 are unserviceable;
  - d. 3 x modern French built corvettes - one was slightly damaged in the South Georgia action, but by now has probably been repaired;
  - e. 3 x submarines - 1 old American guppy (WW II vintage) and 2 modern German - all are diesel driven.
5. A word on capabilities:
- a. Against our SSNs. The two German built submarines are well handled and have good sonar, but only a short range (4 miles) anti-submarine torpedo. The surface ships, technically and tactically, are no match for the SSNs. The few naval aircraft would be held back to protect the carrier, only a handful would then be available for search. We therefore assess the threat to our SSNs as low.
  - b. Against our Task Force - at sea. The ex-German submarines are likely to be more effective against ships and have modern, longish range (13 miles) anti-ship torpedoes. These small submarines are difficult to detect but are agile. The French EXOCET missiles carried in 8 of their ships pose a nasty threat. The air launched version of EXOCET is also carried in the five new Super ETENDARD aircraft which could operate from the carrier. The guns of the old US destroyers are useful. But the

fleet's air defence capability is lowish. In summary, at some risk to themselves the Argentines could inflict limited damage on the Task Force.

#### THE AIR FORCE

6. The Argentine air order of battle is quite impressive - some 170 combat aircraft. But there is a wide mix ranging from the elderly (25 years old) US Sky Hawk to the more modern French Mirages, delivered in 1980. Logistic difficulties will be exacerbated by having to re-deploy aircraft from their main bases to those in the South - an operation in which they are unpractised. Our judgement is that only 60% of the aircraft will be available and that the Argentines could only achieve a sortie rate of 2 a day.

7. The airfield at Port Stanley is crucial. The runway is 4,100 feet and we expect the Argentines to try to improve it within the next 2 weeks, although work has not yet started. But fuel will have to be stockpiled in drums, spares and munitions will have to be brought in and any parked aircraft will be exposed and vulnerable. They have already deployed 4-5 of their close army support aircraft - the Pucara. And a handful of tactical aircraft will probably be deployed when the airfield is ready.

8. Again a brief assessment of capabilities:

a. Against SSN - none.

b. Against the Task Force at Sea. There are two problems;

(1) Firstly detection, for which they only have 2 aged Neptunes (1800nm) and the carrier born Trackers. They will not be able to obtain the accurate strike data they need, even with Soviet help.

(2) Secondly, they can really only operate in daylight and in good weather. Even then their weapons are only marginally effective. And they are not trained in anti-shipping strikes.

Overall we judge the air threat to be only moderate. The Argentines will need luck on their side if they are to inflict substantial damage on the Task Force.

c. Against the Amphibious Force - in an assault. The problems are much the same. They could mount some offensive air support from the mainland by day, none by night and little in poor weather. They cannot provide effective air defence cover from the mainland. Aircraft at Stanley could partially make good these failings. But there is a difficult balance to be struck between attack and air defence - neither could be met in full. However, the Pucara which can operate off grass strips, would be effective in both the anti-helicopter and close support roles.

#### THE ARMY

9. The Argentine Army is large - 85,000 - which selective mobilisation has built up further. Numbers are not a problem to them. It too has a heterogenous mix of equipment. It is a one year conscript Army with all the limitations this implies. And it lacks any experience of joint operations.

10. Although the build up of the Falkland Islands garrison has been given over-riding priority, the Argentine will all the while be looking over her shoulder towards Chile. Nevertheless the garrison will probably receive, or has received, the equipment it wants, given the obvious constraints of its sea and air lines of communication - the former having been virtually cut. The men are a mix of young, raw conscripts and the more professional parachutists and marines.

11. The force is now probably some 7,000 strong, built up around:

- a. 3 infantry, 1 airborne and 2 marine battalions equipped with mortars and anti-tank guns
- b. an artillery regiment with 105mm guns
- c. some armoured vehicles
- d. air defence weapons: Tiger Cat, Blowpipe and 40mm Bofors.

12. In his battle appreciation, General Menendez will no doubt be taking account of the following factors:

- a. The weather. The winter is closing in. It is wet, windy and very cold. Troops need shelter.
- b. The ground. Outside Stanley the going is appalling. Helicopters are critical to any deployment. There is no natural cover. Digging-in is difficult - peat bog or rock.
- c. Vital objectives. Stanley is the prize:
  - (1) above all its airport and the high ground dominating it
  - (2) the port itself, its fuel storage tanks

(3) the pumping station which provides all the water for the town

(4) the electricity generating station

(5) the radio station

But he cannot neglect the outlying settlements. And the Argentines probably accept that South Georgia, which we believe is defended only by about 50 marines, is a hostage to fortune.

d. The civilian population. Menendez may well unscrupulously exploit the civilian, mainly British, population. He will probably deliberately site his positions among them. He may even move some families out onto the airfield, therefore hoping to dissuade us from directly bombarding or assaulting the town. He is unlikely to permit the civilians to be withdrawn, under the Red Cross or any other pretext.

e. Logistics. With the ruthless commandeering Menendez can accommodate all his troops. Initially the supply arrangements were a shambles, but he has probably now built up his stocks of ammunition and food. He is probably confident that he can withstand a total blockade for say several weeks.

f. Finally, morale. The garrison will feel increasingly isolated the longer the sea, and later perhaps the air, blockade runs. Ships sunk or the loss of South Georgia would be bitter blows, particularly if we exploit them. Morale may falter.

13. Menendez would probably prefer us to seize a lodgement area distant from Stanley where, because ground movement is almost impossible, we could not directly threaten the town itself. And where we would have to deploy in the open and fight the battle for survival in the harsh winter. Meanwhile he could sit tight. A stalemate perhaps to his advantage would have been created.

14. Thus he will probably try to persuade us, both in the reality and in the fiction (by disinformation), that Stanley is too hard a nut to crack. He may therefore deploy his force roughly as follows:

- a. the bulk (a 3 battalion brigade) covering Stanley and its critical installations
- b. the remainder (2-3 battalions) covering the outlying areas, with OPs watching the beaches.

#### STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

15. Overall, I judge the military strengths and weaknesses of the Argentine stance to be:

- a. Firstly - Their strengths

- (1) They now hold the Islands. The nation has (apparently) rallied behind the military Junta. Morale is high - but brittle.

- (2) Time is their ally. They have time to redeploy their air force; time to position their fleet, time to prepare the defences on the Islands and time to build up its stocks.



(3) They suspect the British will be loath to inflict casualties on the mainly British civil population - let alone the other military operational casualties we may suffer. This may deter our plans.

(4) They must hope that their air force will impose some damage on the Task Force, if it closes the Falkland Islands.

b. Secondly - Weaknesses.

(1) At sea, their Navy is no match for the RN units. The Argentines cannot maintain ships on station for any length of time. They are especially vulnerable to SSN attack.

(2) In the face of the Sea Harriers, they cannot guarantee to achieve local air superiority over the Islands by day let alone by night.

(3) Lastly, the Falkland Islands Garrison is wholly dependent on its L of C with the mainland. The sea link has virtually been cut. The air link, of which Stanley airport is the jugular vein, is highly vulnerable.

CONCLUSION

16. On balance, I stand by my earlier assessment that the Task Force holds the balance of military power at sea, particularly while it holds off to the East of the Falklands.

17. It has the capability to re-possess South Georgia at small risk and to secure a bridge head on the Falklands at little cost. But the Stanley Garrison will be difficult to dislodge. The Argentines will probably mount, indeed are mounting, a carefully orchestrated disinformation campaign to heighten these difficulties.

18. Finally, provided the air L of C is cut, the longer the assault on Stanley itself is delayed the more vulnerable will the Garrison become - both physically and mentally.

Purpos and of Military Orders. Starting with the general dispositions of our own forces as at 0100 hours on 10/10/68.

2. First, the 5th Airborne Division. The 1st and 2nd Airborne Divisions are the main assault force and the 3rd will support. South Georgia operations.

3. Second, the South Georgia Group which will assault the island. Its composition of surface ships is HMSA, HMSB, HMSD, HMSF, HMSH and HMSI. I shall return to their task later.

4. Third, the Carrier Battle Group. The 1st Carrier Battle Group is split; the carriers led by HMSA are on the way to Ascension and due to arrive there late tomorrow. The 2nd Carrier Battle Group is split; the carriers led by HMSB are on the way to Ascension and due to arrive there late tomorrow. The 3rd Carrier Battle Group is split; the carriers led by HMSD are on the way to Ascension and due to arrive there late tomorrow. The 4th Carrier Battle Group is split; the carriers led by HMSF are on the way to Ascension and due to arrive there late tomorrow. The 5th Carrier Battle Group is split; the carriers led by HMSH are on the way to Ascension and due to arrive there late tomorrow. The 6th Carrier Battle Group is split; the carriers led by HMSI are on the way to Ascension and due to arrive there late tomorrow.

5. Lastly, the Amphibious Landing Group is due to arrive Ascension on Monday 12 April, where readjustment and loading will take place.

6. Moving now to the Troops embarked in the Amphibious Landing Group. There are 1,500 men from 3 Parachute Brigades and a Parachute Battalion with artillery, rapid air defence, armoured recon vehicles, engineers and light helicopter support. 25 Sea Harriers provide offensive air support and air defence. There are also sufficient helicopters to lift up to 150 troops in the first wave of a landing. There are also 2 helicopter gunships.

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FORCE DISPOSITIONS AND MILITARY OPTIONS - BY ACDS (OPS)

1. I am now going to speak Prime Minister about our own Forces and on Military Options. Starting with the present dispositions of our own Ships as at 0600 this morning.
2. First, the SSNs or Hunter/Killer Submarines. Two are now in the Exclusion Zone and the third will support South Georgia operations.
3. Second, the South Georgia Group which will repossess the Island. Its composition of surface ships is ANTRIM, PLYMOUTH, TIDESPRIING and ENDURANCE. I shall return to their task later.
4. Third, the Carrier Battle Group. At the moment the group is split; the carriers led by HERMES are on the way to Ascension and due to arrive there late tomorrow Friday. Five destroyers and frigates, with a supporting tanker are proceeding on ahead.
5. Lastly, the Amphibious Landing Group is due to reach Ascension on Monday 19 April, where readjustment in loading will take place.
6. Moving now to the Troops embarked in the Amphibious Landing Group. There are 4,600 men from 3 RM Commandos and a Parachute Battalion with Artillery, Rapier Air Defence, Armoured Recce Vehicles, Engineers and Light Helicopter support. 20 Sea Harriers provide offensive air support and air defence. There are also sufficient helicopters to lift up to 240 troops in the first wave of a landing. There are also 2 helicopter gunships.

7. The following are the ships which have to date been taken up from trade:

a. Escort Tankers	2
b. Auxiliary Support	4
c. Freighting	5
d. Water Carrier	1
e. Salvage Tugs	3
f. Forward Support Ship	1
g. Amphibious Lift	2
h. Auxiliary Minesweepers	4
j. Hospital Ships	1

Some have been provided with additional facilities for helicopter operations, replenishment at sea and extra communications equipment.

8. So far RAF Hercules and VC10's, and civil Belfast aircraft have lifted nearly 500 tons of freight, 13 helicopters and about 1100 men to, and for onward movement from, Ascension.

9. Maritime Air Surveillance is being carried out by 2 Nimrod aircraft from Ascension. To remain on patrol for three hours they have a range of 1200 nm but for dropping mail and urgently required spares they can fly out to 1800 nm.

10. That covers the whereabouts of our own forces. I will now discuss Military Options.

11. The first which you have already approved is the enforcement of the 200 mile Exclusion Zone. The two SSNs have been instructed to attack all Argentine warships which includes submarines, and naval auxiliaries within the Zone.

12. Communications to and from the SSNs are carried out at regular preplanned intervals. These intervals can be varied but the shorter the interval the greater are the tactical restrictions placed upon the Submarine Commander who has to come to periscope depth to receive signals.

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14. The environment in South Georgia is generally harsh. The temperature is normally around freezing at the time of year. Fog is commonplace and gales frequent. Although icebergs are present there is little danger of the sea freezing over.

15. Third - The establishment of sea control and air superiority of the Exclusion Zone after the Carrier Battle Group arrives on about 28 April. At this stage we shall have the capability to stop and return back merchant ships, to intercept Argentine Air Transport Aircraft, and thereby prevent

them from flying in further reinforcements or supplies to sustain their forces, to use Harriers for offensive air operations and ships surface to air missile systems.

In short, we shall be able to dominate the area.

16. Fourth - The repossession of the Falkland Islands.

The aim here is to put a force ashore with a view to repossession with minimum civilian casualties and minimum damage to property. The Amphibious Landing Group could arrive about 7 May and a Military Appreciation is being prepared, after which the Force Commander will be directed to provide a plan. Until this has been done, Prime Minister, I would prefer not to elaborate. The key factor of course, is the gaining of intelligence, which leads to the use of Special Forces.

17. After the South Georgia operation, in which 70 SAS, 14 Special Boat Section are involved, the priorities for employment are firstly, to gather and report intelligence from the Falkland Islands and secondly, for offensive operations. We have another 100 SAS and 14 Special Boat Section personnel in UK ready to deploy at short notice.

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FOI SECTION 27

20. Finally a word on logistics. I will not disguise the difficulties which the very considerable distances impose. The length of our supply lines has made it necessary to establish a Joint Service Support Unit on Ascension. This is already fully operational. We are making considerable use of Wideawake airfield and local communications and support facilities.

21. In terms of fuel, food and stores, the Task Force is self-sufficient in the South Atlantic until the last half of May. These estimates, of course, would be reduced in the event of casualties and plans are being drawn up for the resupply of the force to sustain it for at least a six month period. This will certainly necessitate taking up further ships from trade.

22. In short, there are logistic difficulties but they will be surmounted.

14 April 1982