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D.N. Plans 23/6

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Command 8288 and the Falklands Crisis

Ref. DUS(N) 14/2/35.1(173) of 26 April 1982

I have been passed a copy of the Reference by DNOT and am replying in his place. Although I recognise the political content of the proposed replies I am very uneasy about the line that is being suggested. I do not believe that an operation of the scale and complexity we are now witnessing could be mounted effectively in the future given the present plan for the Navy. To all intents and purposes, today's Navy is the one planned prior to the 1981 Defence Review; tomorrow's (particularly after 1984) will be very different. It has therefore been possible to mount the Falklands operation in such a short timescale because of the flexibility we still have in our programme - in terms of ship types and numbers, warfare capabilities, dockyards and, not least, naval manpower; but this flexibility will disappear.

2. To be more specific:-

- a. Although it is CFS' area, I doubt very much whether the naval bases in the future would be capable of doing the sort of work that the dockyards have achieved for this operation. Flight decks have been constructed, RAS points fitted and tested, ballast tanks converted and so forth; with the reductions in the surface fleet we shall have to rely even more heavily on ships taken up from trade and we will be singularly ill-equipped to cope. Future dockyard capacity is barely adequate to support front-line let alone extra commitments of this sort.
- b. The surface fleet will not remain the same until the 1990s. We have effectively 3 CVS' today - 2 operational and one close to completion, which is not dissimilar from having 3 in service with one of them in refit. Our DD/FF force level today is 55 operational ships (there are none in the standby squadron). By the end of the decade

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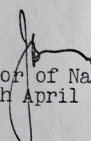
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we shall have 50 with up to 8 in the standby squadron; and even this assumes that proposed addbacks to LTC 82 are implemented. The drop in readily available ships will thus be from 55 to 42 - or almost 25 per cent.

- c. Although on one particular definition the number of major ships and submarines operational may be more in 1985 than today, this is a snapshot which conceals a very worrying trend downwards in both total numbers and numbers operational over the decade. Similarly the £½ bn. more expenditure on the (conventional) Navy is also a snapshot: the underlying trend in targets is downwards, particularly after 1985, and the percentage this represents of the total Defence budget reduces correspondingly.
- d. Again, although it is CFS' area, I doubt whether the Falklands operation in its present form would be possible in the future after the drop in numbers of RFAs, with the consequent reduction in flexibility. We have recovered TIDEPOOL, PEARLEAF and STROMNESS on this occasion; but by 1985 we shall also have lost (on LTC 82 plans) TIDESPRING, PLUMLEAF and OLNA, and RESOURCE will have been massively de-humidified. No ships will have entered the Fleet to replace them.

3. I am sorry if some of this appears unhelpful and wholly out of tune with political realities. I am concerned that if a line is taken which is misleading it will be seen to be so before too long; after all, at its simplest, it would be extraordinary if we were able to remove £5 billion from the conventional Navy's budget over a fairly short timescale and still claim to have roughly the same capability to mount major operations in the future. Second, it is important that people should realise that the capability and capacity the Royal Navy has had in the past, and is achieving today, cannot necessarily be assumed for the future if it is starved of funds.

  
Director of Naval Plans  
28th April 1982

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