

COS(Misc) 187/742/1

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MILITARY OPTIONS FOR REPOSSESSION OF THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

1. The attached paper, prepared by the Defence Secretariat in accordance with the instructions (1) of the Chiers of Staff, will be tabled for the consideration of the Chiefs of Staff at their meeting on Sunday 2 May 1982.

Attachment:

Military Options for Repossession of the Falkland Islands (15 pages).

Note:

1. COS 35th Meeting/82, Item 4.

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1 May 1982

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MILITARY OPTIONS FOR REPOSSESSION OF THE FALKLAND ISLANDSIn Ascending Order of Severity

1. Psychological Operations.
2. Repossession of South Sandwich.
3. Prolonged cutting of Argentine lines of communication to Falkland Islands.
4. Harassment operations against Argentine garrison by Special Forces/Commando raids.
5. Harassment operations against the Argentine garrison by Air and Sea attacks.
6. Unrestricted attacks against Argentine naval units at sea.
7. Landing with limited aim of establishing a secure military presence on part of the Falkland Islands without attempting to evict Argentines.
8. Landing and repossession of the Falkland Islands.
9. Mining/Blockading mainland Argentine ports.
10. Attack Argentine mainland targets.
11. Landing Southern Argentina (Tierra del Fuego).
12. [REDACTED]

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1. OPTION - Psychological Operations.
2. FORCES REQUIRED/AVAILABLE - Special.
3. TIMING - From now.

PROSPolitical:

Low Cost.

Military:

Preparation already in hand.

Confuses enemy's Command
and weakens morale.

CONSPolitical:

Prejudices integrity of UK.

Military:

Limited effectiveness.

Supportive of other measures;
not a decisive measure in itself.

tasks.

Virtually impossible to sustain.

Weather conditions could abort
operation.

1. OPTION - Repossession of South Sandwich.
2. FORCES REQUIRED/AVAILABLE - Current dispositions.
3. TIMING - From now.

PROSPolitical:

Relevant to UK stake in Antarctica.

Military:

Small scale operation.

Military:

Isolation of Argentine Forces on Falkland Islands would erode will and capacity to counter subsequent landing.

Attrition could be imposed on Argentine naval and air forces.

Could be sustained for considerably longer than a wide geographical exclusion zone.

CONSPolitical:

Looks like a soft option.

Exerts very little pressure on Argentina to withdraw troops from Falkland Islands.

Military:

Diverts forces from higher priority tasks.

Virtually impossible to garrison.

Weather conditions could abort operation.

OPTION - Prolonged cutting of Argentine lines of communication to Falkland islands - 'Blockade'.

2. FORCES REQUIRED/AVAILABLE - Task Force as deployed.

3. TIMING - From 2 May.

PROS

Political:

Graduated increase in pressure on Argentine.

Maintains political objective with minimum use of force.

Obviates risk of civilian casualties among Falkland Islanders.

Minimises risk of potential action against neutral shipping and aircraft.

Might in time be sufficient to create favourable climate for negotiated withdrawal.

Clearly related to self defence under Article 51.

Military:

Isolation of Argentine Forces on Falkland Islands would erode will and capacity to counter subsequent landing.

Attrition could be imposed on Argentine naval and air forces.

Could be sustained for considerably longer than a wide geographical exclusion zone.

CONS

Political:

Could impose hardship on Falkland Islanders.

Implies acceptance of prolonged crisis.

Military:

Long term degradation of UK commitment to NATO.

Doubtful if air EZ could be extended for a prolonged period without reinforcement of UK air presence in Falkland Islands area. In this context see option 3 (continued overleaf) for prolonging the current level of UK air presence in the Falkland Islands.

1. OPTION - Prolong current level of UK air presence in Falkland Islands area.
2. FORCES REQUIRED/AVAILABLE -
 - a. Lease/lend additional carrier from US or Australia.
 - b. Bring forward ILLUSTRIOUS.
 - c. Recover BULWARK.
3. TIMING -
 - a. Lease/lend - probably several months.
 - b. ILLUSTRIOUS - by early August.
 - c. BULWARK - 6 months.

PROSPolitical:

Unequivocal demonstration of allied support for UK.

Military:

Could decisively improve prospects for sustaining air superiority over Falkland Islands and prolonging Exclusion Zone.

Enhances prospect for sustained intensive air operations.

CONSa. Lend/Lease OptionsPolitical:

US moderating influence on OAS states would diminish.

Military:

In US case, heightened risk of involving Soviet Union in direct military assistance for Argentina.

RN expertise inadequate to operate US CV without intensive instruction and work up.

Possible incompatibility between UK and US equipment.

Ship remains dependent on US support backing.

Australians likely to be reluctant to risk their sole carrier, which is in any case ageing.

PROS

1. PROS - Harassment operations against Argentine garrisons by Special Forces/Commando raids.
2. FORCES REQUIRED/AVAILABLE - Sufficient forces embarked in Task Force and Amphibious Landing Ship (LST).
3. TIMING - Limited capability by Special Forces from 13 May.

PROSPolitical:

Successful attacks on high value targets would be consistent with minimum use of force, and would demonstrate HMG's resolve to take action against the Garrison without putting the civilian population at risk.

Military:

Scale and nature of attacks can be graduated and controlled to achieve disproportionate and accumulative effect.

Useful preparation for subsequent landing operation.

Confusing command and eroding the will to defend.

CONSb. ILLUSTRIOUS

ILLUSTRIOUS not a worked-up or operational unit and therefore at increased risk.

Ship/facilities not fully proven.

c. BULWARK

Unlikely to prove reliable once deployed.

Political:

The destruction of targets such as water and power supplies could cause hardship to civilian population.

The failure of a Special Forces/Commando operation could present the Argentines with a significant propaganda weapon.

Limited influence on negotiations.

Could lead to reprisals against civil population in Falkland Islands.

Military:

In the event of something going wrong, extraction would be difficult.

1. OPTION - Harassment Operations against Argentine garrison by Special Forces/Commando raids.
2. FORCES REQUIRED/AVAILABLE - SAS/SBS/Commando Forces embarked in Task Force and Amphibious Task Force.
3. TIMING - Limited capability from 30 April. Greater capability from 13 May.

PROSPolitical:

Successful attacks on high value targets would be consistent with minimum use of force, and would demonstrate HMG's resolve to take action against the Garrison without putting the civilian population at risk.

Military:

Scale and nature of attacks can be graduated and controlled to achieve disproportionate and accumulative effect.

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Military:

In the event of something going wrong, extraction would be difficult.

1. OPTION - Harassment Operations against the Argentine Garrison by Air and Sea Attacks.
2. FORCES REQUIRED/AVAILABLE - Vulcans, Harriers, DD/FF.
3. TIMING - From 30 April.

PROSVulcansMilitary:

Neutralisation of Stanley Airfield would enhance impact of TEZ and deny aerial resupply.

Political:

Ability to strike from long range would have immediate impact on sense of domestic security within mainland Argentina.

Harriers/Naval BombardmentMilitary:

Selective attacks would weaken garrison capability and resolve.

Other features of military importance eg. airstrips, radar/POL/ammunition sites could be attacked discriminately.

CONSPolitical:

Strategic bombing could undermine international support for HMG.

Some risk of civilian casualties and damage to infrastructure.

Political difficulties of attacking first.

Possible reprisals, or unrestrained mob attacks, against UK civilians on mainland.

Military:

Not an option if the Argentine fleet remains in port.

1. OPTION - Unrestricted attacks against Argentine Naval Units at sea.
2. FORCES REQUIRED/AVAILABLE - SSN/SSK Sea Harrier Vulcan/Victor Nimrod DD/FF.
3. TIMING - SSN/SSK when maritime TEZ secured. DD/FF? Nimrod.

PROSPolitical:

Potential for clear and early success.

Sinkings might bring Argentine to negotiate more seriously.

Demoralising to Argentine public opinion and garrison.

Military:

Sinkings, particularly "25 of May", will enhance chances of success of TEZ or landing.

Lessens risk to UK assets.

Smaller UK garrison of FI needed in wake of re-occupation.

CONSPolitical:

High visibility of success could engender strong OAS/World reaction against UK; alienate our friends.

Spread of conflict area could arouse adverse international reaction.

Political difficulties of attacking first.

Possible reprisals, or unrestrained mob attacks, against UK civilians on mainland.

Military:

Not an option if the Argentine fleet remains in port.

1. OPTION - Landing with limited aim of establishing a secure military presence on part of the Falklands without attempting to evict Argentines.
2. FORCES REQUIRED/AVAILABLE - Task Force and Amphibious Landing Force as presently constituted.
3. TIMING - 13 - 31 May.

Political:PROSPolitical:

Negotiation might be possible free from the extreme emotions which might be generated by more direct confrontation.

UN might intervene and secure mutual withdrawal.

Civilian casualties and damage kept to minimum.

Maintain political initiative consistent with minimum use of force.

Military:

Control of major part of Falklands could be established.

Might be possible to establish base ashore for Harrier/support helicopter operations: Hence less dependent on embarked air capability.

In siege easier to provide for support of force and protection from elements.

Scale of operations more susceptible to control.

Enhance ability to sustain 'Softening up' operations against Argentine positions.

Political:CONSPolitical:

UN intervention might not result in resolution of sovereignty issue to HMG's satisfaction?

Could lead to long term stalemate.

Military:

Difficult to sustain while continuing to maintain exclusion zone.

Danger of a prolonged campaign with need to defend fleet and landing force against air attack.

support while maintaining Total Exclusion Zone.

Capability to maintain intensive operations could decline rapidly from end May.

Loss of carrier, particularly air assets, would jeopardise landing and/or subsequent operations.

Might be impossible to avoid bloody confrontation with resultant heavy casualties and battle damage.

Offloading and distribution of logistics very difficult.

Current scales of helicopters would limit concurrent ability to provide logistic resupply and tactical mobility.

1. OPTION - Landing in, and repossession of the Falkland Islands.
2. FORCES REQUIRED/AVAILABLE - Task Force and Amphibious Landing Force as presently constituted with possible addition of Brigade Group.
3. TIMING - 13 - 31 May.

PROSPolitical:

Direct and unambiguous demonstration of HMG's resolve.

Climate could be created for negotiated settlement.

Military:

Concentration of force would put early and maximum pressure on Argentine garrison.

Possibility of evicting Argentines militarily.

Most direct means of attempting to restore British control.

Operational planning already well underway.

CONSPolitical:

International (and domestic) support could be undermined.

Military stalemate could ensue.

Military:

Achievement of objective could be frustrated by need to minimise civilian casualties and damage to infrastructure.

A siege would not necessarily be to UK advantage given weather conditions and extended supply lines.

Would place severe strain on ability to provide sustained sea and air support while maintaining Total Exclusion Zone.

Capability to maintain intensive operations could decline rapidly from end May.

Loss of carrier, particularly air assets, would jeopardise landing and/or subsequent operations.

Might be impossible to avoid bloody confrontation with resultant heavy casualties and battle damage.

Offloading and distribution of logistics very difficult.

Current scales of helicopters would limit concurrent ability to provide logistic resupply and tactical mobility.

1. OPTION - Mining/blockading the mainland Argentine ports.
2. FORCES REQUIRED/AVAILABLE - SSNs; Scuttle block ships;
Blockade: SSN/SSK.
3. TIMING - Most assets immediately available apart from scuttle block ships.

PROSBLOCKADEPolitical:

Immediately increases economic pressure.

Port closure achieved without casualties.

Military:

Degrades fleet support.

MININGPolitical:

Likely to lead to immediate cessation of trade.

Military:

Direct impact on mainland without risking land battle.

CONSBLOCKADEPolitical:

Increased motive for Soviet involvement because of disruption to grain supplies.

Military:

Scuttle only effective in narrow channels and costly.

MININGPolitical:

Difficult to present internationally; relevance to Article 51 unclear.

Indiscriminate effect on third countries.

Military:

Would disperse UK naval capability.

Added risk of sinking neutral shipping.

SSN capability limited in shallow waters.

1. OPTION - Attack Argentine mainland targets.
2. FORCES REQUIRED/AVAILABLE - Vulcans and/or Special Forces.
3. TIMING - Vulcans - Available at Ascension Island 29 April 1982
Special Force - Embarked on Task Force and Amphibious Landing Force. Available shortly.

PROSPolitical:

Military targets could be chosen to minimise casualties.

Attacks would be highly visible manoeuvre of HMG's resolve.

Impact on Argentine domestic opinion would be immediate. Not certain whether this would strengthen or weaken their resolve to hold the Falkland Islands.

Attacks on Argentine air bases operating in support of Falkland Islands would be easier to justify under terms of Article 51.

Attacks against air bases etc from which forces were emanating would not be so escalatory.

Military:

Surprise.

Bombing of airfields would reduce effectiveness of Argentine air force.

Special forces operations could be carefully controlled.

CONSPolitical:

Difficult to justify attacks on military facilities not operating in support of Argentine effort.

Legitimacy might be challenged in context of Article 51 of UN charter.

International support for HMG could be eroded.

Direct incentive for reprisals against British ex-patriates in Argentina.

Military:

Only a limited capability for air attack in view of range and AAR support needed.

Insertion and extraction of special forces would be difficult and could put at risk the delivery vehicles/SSNs helicopter platforms etc.

Could give rise to large number of civilian casualties.

Action might generate active military support for Argentine. British forces could be greatly outnumbered.

1. OPTION -- Landing in Southern Argentine (Tierra del Fuego).
2. FORCES REQUIRED/AVAILABLE -- Task Force and Amphibious Landing Force as deployed.
3. TIMING -- From mid-May.

PROSPolitical:

Devastating blow for junta.

Might provide bargaining counter for withdrawal of Argentine forces from Falkland Islands.

Might be achieved with minimal casualties/losses.

Would be positive measure of HMG resolve.

Military:

Demonstrates capability to extend conflict.

Good prospects for surprise.

CONSPolitical:

Legitimacy under Article 51 of UN Charter would be challenged.

International support could be eroded.

Chile might seek active involvement; this could widen scope of conflict.

Risk of drawing in Latin American and other countries.

Military:

Logistic tail further extended.

Very vulnerable to Argentine counter attack, especially by air: Argentine mainland bases in South Argentina would have to be neutralised.

Would greatly reduce capacity for subsequent operations against Argentine Forces on Falkland Islands.

TEZ could not be maintained in parallel.

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