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*PS
PS/Mr Luce
Mr Gifford
Mr URE
Defence Dept*

IMMEDIATE IMPLICATIONS FOR CIVIL DEPARTMENTS OF AN
ARGENTINIAN INVASION OF THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

MINUTES of a Meeting held in
Conference Room F, Cabinet Office, on
FRIDAY 2 APRIL 1982 at 2.30 pm

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PRESENT

- Mr R L L Facer, Cabinet Office (In the Chair)
- Mr A Howard, Home Office
- Mr C Hulse, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
- Mr R S Reeve, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
- Mr R M Hastie-Smith, Ministry of Defence
- Mr N J Beaumont, Ministry of Defence
- Group Captain J L Dillon, Ministry of Defence
- Mrs E M McLoughlin, Ministry of Defence
- Commander A J Bannister, Ministry of Defence
- Mr F H Elders, Department of Transport
- Mr J D Henes, Department of Trade (Shipping)
- Mr A Fortnam, Department of Trade (Civil Aviation)
- Mr R B M Williams, Department of Trade (Civil Aviation)
- Mr S S Holness, Department of Trade (Shipping)
- Mr P Abbott, Central Office of Information
- Mr C H O'D Alexander, Cabinet Office (Secretary)
- Cdr G R G Middleton, Cabinet Office (Secretary)

1. DIPLOMATIC AND MILITARY SITUATION

THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE reported that there had as yet been no confirmation of the report, received via the British Antarctic Survey Office in Cambridge at about 12.45 pm that an Argentinian invasion of the Falkland Islands had taken place. There had been no reports of a landing in South Georgia although an earlier intelligence report had suggested that an Argentinian warship was due there at 5.00 pm in the afternoon with instructions to round up British civilians. Communications with Port Stanley had not been achieved since 8.00 am in the morning, and had ceased with HMS Endurance at about 1.00 pm.

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THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE reported that HMS Endurance was now half way between South Georgia and Port Stanley and that, following discussions between the Prime Minister, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Defence Secretary on the evening of 1 April, considerable military preparations were being made on a contingency basis. The 3rd Commando Brigade, comprising three Commando Groups, an Headquarters element and logistic support had been placed on standby and the Army was now involved in outloading the force's war maintenance reserve. A naval Task Force was being formed, partly from ships currently in Gibraltar and partly from those in United Kingdom ports. All these naval and military forces would be at four hours notice to move from the afternoon of Sunday, 4 April. No decisions on their deployment had been taken. Eleven Hercules aircraft had already started to deploy with the aim of delivering three helicopters and a small ground detachment to Ascension Island where they would be embarked in a Royal Fleet Auxiliary en route to the island.

2. ACTION BY CIVIL DEPARTMENTS

In discussion the following points were made -

- a. British merchant shipping had been warned through the General Council of British Shipping not to enter Argentinian territorial waters and to keep clear of the Falkland Islands. British ships in Argentinian ports had similarly been advised to leave. British Caledonian, the only British airline operating a scheduled service to Argentina, had cancelled the day's flight and suspended further services.
- b. It was too early to consider what action might be taken in respect of Argentinian citizens in the United Kingdom except that Argentinian Embassy personnel, who could be expected to be trying to gather information on any British military preparations, should be kept under surveillance.
- c. A separate meeting of officials, under Treasury chairmanship, was examining the question of what economic sanctions could be applied to Argentina.

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d. The position on any shipments of military equipment and spares to Argentina needed to be established. Applications for export licences for such items and for high technology equipment which could be of military value were not being processed.

e. One Argentinian merchant ship was in a United Kingdom port, at Newhaven, and was under observation. Two more were due to arrive at Heysham. A flight by an Argentinian aircraft to the United Kingdom scheduled for the previous day had been cancelled for what they had described as technical reasons.

In discussion of the civil support which might be required for any military deployment it was noted that civil aircraft were unlikely to be required: the Royal Air Force transport fleet could be fully committed. If merchant ships were needed, freighters could be chartered but passenger carrying vessels would need to be requisitioned. An Order in Council would be required to enable the Royal Prerogative to be used for requisitioning.

In further discussion it was suggested that an approach should be made to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to invite them to see to the needs of any casualties resulting from an Argentinian invasion. In practice the facilities on the Falkland Islands might already be adequate; this would not necessarily be so on South Georgia. It was difficult to make an immediate judgement on an approach to the ICRC. But besides the humanitarian aspect of such a move, it would provide scope for embarrassing the Argentines on whose facilities the ICRC would be dependent for access to the Falkland Islands and South Georgia.

THE CHAIRMAN said that, as regards the handling of urgent issues over the weekend, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence would each be manning their offices on a 24 hour basis. Such matters as obtaining overflight clearances would be dealt with using the normal channels. It seemed unlikely to be necessary to convene meetings of officials in the Cabinet Office, but arrangements had been made to do so at very short notice if the need arose.

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The Meeting -

1. Invited the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Trade to establish the position on military equipment and spares awaiting shipment to Argentina, and noted that no further processing of export licence applications would take place.
2. Noted that if the Ministry of Defence needed to make use of passenger carrying merchant ships, they would have to be requisitioned and an Order in Council would be required to enable the Royal Prerogative to be used for this purpose.
3. Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to pursue the question of an approach to the International Committee of the Red Cross in relation to possible casualties on the Falkland Islands or South Georgia.
4. Invited the Cabinet Office to arrange for the Security Service to place members of the Argentinian Embassy in the United Kingdom under surveillance.

Cabinet Office

2 April 1982

Distribution

Those present plus

Mr Coles, Prime Minister's Office
Sir Robert Armstrong, Cabinet Office
Mr J P McIntyre, HM Treasury

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