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ABR30 – MoD MEMO – FORCE LEVELS: REINFORCEMENT (cab 148/212)

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OD(SA) (82)39

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30th April 1982

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DEFENCE AND OVERSEA POLICY COMMITTEE

Sub Committee on the South Atlantic and the
Falkland Islands—
FORCE LEVELS: REINFORCEMENTMemorandum by Secretary of State for Defence
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1. Now that the Carrier Battle Group has virtually reached the Falkland Islands area, the Total Exclusion Zone has been declared and South Georgia re-possessed, it is prudent to review the forces needed for landing operations to re-possess the Falkland Islands.

/ A note explaining the requirement for reinforcements is attached at Annex A.

2. The Commander-in-Chief has been instructed by the Chiefs of Staff to plan "to effect a landing with a view to the re-possession of the Falkland Islands". On present intelligence estimates, we must assume that the Argentine garrison on the Falkland Islands numbers some 9,000 men or roughly 7-8 battalions. Against that, with his present forces, the Commander-in-Chief could land at his selected point with about 5,500 men, roughly 5 battalions. His military judgement, which the Chiefs of Staff endorse, is that this force level should be adequate to establish a viable bridgehead and advance inland to develop further operations. But if Argentine forces are established in strength in well prepared defensive positions in and around Port Stanley, and given his constraints of minimum damage to civilians and to civilian property, he could face stalemate. Time would not be on our side, and our forces could

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face air attacks from Argentine aircraft, husbanded during the imposition of our TEZ.

3. If the Commander-in-Chief is required to achieve the re-possession of the Falkland Islands as a whole in the face of continuing resistance he may well need to use more forces. His judgement, with which the Chiefs of Staff concur, is that, given his long line of communications, arrangements should be made now to move forward to the area 5 Brigade (and supporting elements including helicopters) which is trained and ready for the task. Additional Harriers may also be needed but a decision on timing for these is less critical.

4. If we are to get these extra forces to the area to be readily available within 2-3 weeks after the earliest date for a landing, we shall have to move fast. There will be a significant addition to the logistic task. We shall have to take up more ships from trade. This is the critical element in the timing. Decisions therefore must be reached now.

5. Finally, it must be accepted that if we achieve re-possession on military terms without an accompanying political settlement, we need to consider what further military provision must be made. Unless there is some kind of political solution, effectively guaranteed, we shall have to plan on a substantial garrison on the Falkland Islands while the threat remains.

6. I invite my colleagues to agree that 5 Brigade and supporting elements should now be moved forward to the area of operations, and to note that extra shipping for this task will have to be taken up from trade starting now. A separate paper on the shipping aspects will be circulated for consideration.

Annex:

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A. Falkland Landing Operations: Reinforcement (3 pages).

Ministry of Defence

30th April 1982

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1. The Chiefs of Staff have considered the question of force levels in the context of the principal military options and their possible outcomes.
2. At this stage of their consideration, the Chiefs of Staff wish to emphasize that judgements are made against the background of the current intelligence. Clearly, as events unfold and further intelligence becomes available, these judgements could change.

Total Exclusion Zone (TEZ)

3. Full scale enforcement of the 200 mile exclusion zone and the Falklands, by sea and air, is about to be undertaken by the Task Force. This isolation of the Argentine garrison should have a severely weakening effect. It is a necessary precursor to any further option.
4. To maximise pressure on Argentine forces, early operations while enforcing the TEZ must include a softening up by a steady attrition. Putting Port Stanley airfield out of action will be critical. Other key targets and military installations will need to be attacked by our aircraft. SAS and SBS attacks against Argentine military installations and military personnel should lower the garrison's morale and effectiveness.
5. As a condition for landing operations, early action needs to be taken to neutralise Argentine naval forces, particularly the carrier and submarines. Similar action is needed against the Argentine Air Force but with the limitation on attack on mainland airfields, such action will be restricted to air engagements and attacks on aircraft on the ground in the Falkland Islands.
6. The combined effect of some or all of these actions could significantly affect the garrison's will to resist, and might be enough to achieve HMG's objectives, although it is by no means certain.

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(Continued)Landing in the Falklands (Operation SUTTON)

7. After 2-3 weeks of the TEZ, Argentine morale and effectiveness might so decline that conditions were ripe for a quick and successful landing operation. Following the cutting of their lines of communication and the effective harassment of their garrison, Argentine resistance around Port Stanley might crumble; or the political will in Buenos Aires fail.
8. The timing for carrying out operation SUTTON depends on when the Amphibious Force is sailed from Ascension Island, and sufficient intelligence has been obtained. If the force is sailed now, the earliest a landing could take place is about mid May. There follows a window of landing opportunity until about end May. By this time both the effectiveness of carrier borne aircraft and the effectiveness of sea borne troops would be starting to decline.
9. However, a quick success cannot be taken for granted. There is a danger that the force could find, after a successful landing and establishing themselves ashore that 4 or so battalions were dug in and resisting around Port Stanley. The CinC Fleet considers that given his constraints of minimum damage to civilians and civilian property his force might well be insufficient for a complete repossession, and it might come under attack from air and sea forces which had been husbanded. In these circumstances, the advancing winter and the 8000 mile logistic chain would be against us. A stalemate could then ensue.

Total Repossession of the Falkland Islands

10. The situation described in paragraph 9 above would clearly not meet any wider aims of total repossession of the Falklands by military means. We would be facing a new problem on a different scale from Operation SUTTON. Fighting could be heavy and casualties high. Extra forces would be needed. The Commander-in-Chief has asked for an extra brigade to be moved forward to the area together with appropriate combat support and Harrier aircraft and helicopters. (The precise numbers will depend on the degree of attrition sustained and inflicted.) These forces would have to arrive some 2-3 weeks after

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(Continued)

after the main landing and the necessary shipping will have to be taken up now to fit in with the earliest date described in paragraph 8 above. The scale of reinforcement would add very significantly to our logistic problems. However, given these reinforcements, effective blockade and attrition of Argentine naval and air forces, it should then be possible to achieve repossession.

Summary

11. The foregoing options are directed to bringing about conditions for an Argentine withdrawal from the Falkland Islands. CinC Fleet's landing operation (Operation SUTTON) has so far been planned 'with a view to repossession' of the Falklands. We judge that this is feasible with present forces, but there could be a danger of a military stalemate on the Islands. On the one hand Operation SUTTON might create the conditions for a negotiated settlement; on the other hand time, distance and winter weather would be against us if we had to undertake protracted military operations. In these latter circumstances, the Commander in Chief Fleet considers and the Chiefs of Staff agree that he would need an extra Brigade with supporting elements including helicopters closer at hand. In addition, he could need additional Harriers although a decision on the provision of these is not so urgent. Early action will need to be taken to neutralise Argentine naval forces, but, despite any losses we may inflict, the air threat to our forces on the Falkland Islands from the mainland is likely to remain.

Ministry of Defence
30 April 1982

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