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JUL12 – REUNION DE GABINETE # 66 (1015 hs) (cab 148/211)

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OD(SA)(82) 66th Meeting

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CABINET

DEFENCE AND OVERSEA POLICY COMMITTEE

SUB-COMMITTEE ON THE SOUTH ATLANTIC AND THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

MINUTES of a Meeting held at
10 Downing Street on
MONDAY 12 JULY 1982 at 10.15 am

PRESENT

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon William Whitelaw MP
Secretary of State for the
Home Department

The Rt Hon Francis Pym MP
Secretary of State for Foreign
and Commonwealth Affairs

The Rt Hon John Nott MP
Secretary of State for Defence

The Rt Hon Cecil Parkinson MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
and Paymaster General

THE FOLLOWING WERE ALSO PRESENT

The Rt Hon Sir Michael Havers QC MP
Attorney General

Sir Antony Acland
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Sir Arthur Hockaday
Ministry of Defence

SECRETARIAT

Sir Robert Armstrong
Mr A D S Goodall
Mr R L L Facer
Brigadier J A C G Eyre

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1. RETURN OF ARGENTINE PRISONERS

The Sub-Committee had before it telegrams nos. 212 and 214 from HM Embassy at Berne reporting the reactions of the Argentine Government to recent British messages proposing the repatriation of the remaining Argentine prisoners and telegram no. 2394 from HM Embassy at Washington on the same subject.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that the latest Argentine response although unsatisfactory in its references to "the present state" of de facto cessation of hostilities and to the "harsh conditions" in which the prisoners were allegedly being held, provided an acceptable basis on which to repatriate all the prisoners without further delay. Instructions should be sent to the Military Commissioner on the Falklands to make urgent arrangements for the prisoners (including the 35 volunteers who had been helping with mine clearing operations) to be returned by ship to Puerto Madryn, the port nominated by the Argentine authorities. Meanwhile a further message should be sent to the Argentine Government, to which no reply would be required, making it clear that the prisoners were being returned on the basis that Argentine accepted that active hostilities had ended. This message should also firmly rebut the allegation that the prisoners had been held in harsh conditions. It would be desirable to follow it up as soon as possible with a statement that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had pronounced itself satisfied with the treatment accorded to the prisoners during their captivity. The message should be conveyed to the Argentine authorities before 1700Z that day, when the United States Government proposed to announce its intention to rescind American economic measures against Argentina. Further consideration would need to be given to the question of lifting or maintaining the various United Kingdom measures still in force against Argentina: the Total Exclusion Zone; the 12 mile restriction; economic sanctions and the freeze on Argentine assets. It would be helpful if these could be examined at an early meeting of OD(FAF), on the basis of a paper to be prepared by the Defence Secretary in consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The Sub-Committee -

1. Invited the Defence Secretary to arrange for instructions to be sent to the Military Commissioner on the Falklands to arrange for the Argentine prisoners to be repatriated.

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2. Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to arrange for a further message to be transmitted to the Argentine Government on the lines indicated by the Prime Minister in her summing up.

3. Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, in consultation with the Defence Secretary, to seek the urgent concurrence of the International Committee of the Red Cross in a statement that the ICRC were satisfied with the treatment accorded to the Argentine prisoners during their captivity.

4. Invited the Defence Secretary, in consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to make proposals regarding the United Kingdom measures still in force against Argentina, for consideration at an early meeting of OD(FAF).

2. FALKLAND ISLANDS SERVICE

The Sub-Committee had before it a note by the Secretaries (OD(SA))(82) 70 covering a note by Ministry of Defence officials on the arrangements for the Falkland Islands service.

SIR ARTHUR HOCKADAY said that the Dean of St Paul's had been helpful over the arrangements for the service and had shown understanding for the Government's views: he was however constrained by the Archbishop of Canterbury's concern that there should be full and willing participation in the service by leading representatives of churches other than the Church of England. The ideas canvassed earlier that the Lords Prayer should be said in Spanish and that part of the Pope's address at Coventry should be incorporated in the order of service had been dropped and it was now accepted that there should be no explicit reference to the Argentine dead. But there was continued opposition, in particular from the Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council, Dr Kenneth Greet, to the suggestion that the lessons should be read by members of the Armed Forces who had participated in the Falklands operation; and it was understood that the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster also had misgivings on this score. There was some risk that if the suggestion were pressed, some church leaders might decline to take part in the service. This would embarrass the Archbishop of Canterbury and be a cause of inter-denominational bitterness.

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THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said the contention that members of the Armed Forces who had taken part in the Falkland Islands operation should be debarred from reading lessons at the Thanksgiving Service was not acceptable. If this did indeed turn out to be the position of Dr Greet and certain other church leaders, that fact would have to be made known publicly and in Parliament. It would not be appropriate to invite a member of the Royal Family to read one of the lessons: the best solution would be for one lesson to be read by one of the chaplains to the Task Force - preferably the chaplain to the 2nd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment; and for the other lesson to be read by a non-commissioned officer or man from one of the units which had taken part in the operation. As regards attendance at the service by members of the Diplomatic Corps and representatives of Commonwealth and foreign Governments, it was clear that there would be difficulties about whom to invite and whom to exclude: but it was important that those Governments which had demonstrated their support for the United Kingdom during the crisis should be represented. It would be helpful to see a proposed list.

The Sub-Committee -

1. Invited the Defence Secretary to arrange for a further approach to be made to the ecclesiastical authorities explaining the Government's wishes in regard to the Falkland Islands service on the lines indicated by the Prime Minister in her summing up.
2. Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to draw up a list of representatives of foreign and Commonwealth Governments who might be invited to the service.

Cabinet Office

12 July 1982

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