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JUN24 – REUNION DE GABINETE # 62 (1000 hs) (cab 148/211)

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OD(SA)(82) 62nd 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
 THURSDAY 24 JUNE 1982 at 10.00 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 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

Admiral of the Fleet
 Sir Terence Lewin
 Chief of the Defence Staff

Sir Antony Acland
 Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Sir Michael Palliser
 Cabinet Office

SECRETARIAT

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

SUBJECT

SITUATION IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC

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SITUATION IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC

THE CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE STAFF said that some 10,800 Argentine prisoners had now been repatriated: 560 prisoners in special categories were being retained. These included the Argentine Commander, Major General Menendez, and 25 engineers who were supplying information and advice in connection with mine clearing operations. The minefields remained a major preoccupation: complete clearance was required and this would take a long time. Equipment captured included 44 Argentine aircraft and helicopters and two long range warning radars. Most of the aircraft were damaged, but six of the helicopters had been taken into British service. The Argentine navy remained within the twelve mile limit.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that at her meetings in Washington on 23 June, both the President of the United States, Mr Reagan, and the United States Secretary of State, Mr Haig, had shown complete understanding for the British position and had offered technical help with the mine clearing operations. Action should be taken to publicise the fact that the minelaying carried out by Argentine forces had been in contravention of the Geneva Convention and the United Nations Weaponry Convention. The political situation in Argentina remained confused, but there were some indications of a more reasonable approach by the Argentine authorities. The decision to release the three British journalists on bail was a hopeful sign, as was the fact that Argentine forces and air bases were being returned to peacetime levels of readiness: But the fact that Rio Grande airfield was still under close security meant that British forces could not relax their vigilance and that a total cessation of hostilities could not be assumed. The 560 Argentine prisoners still in British hands could be embarked for Ascension Island. Approaches should be made to the Chilean and Uruguayan Governments to obtain permission for British aircraft to divert if necessary to airfields at Punta Arenas and Montevideo. Meanwhile a further approach should be made to the Argentine Government to try to secure confirmation that hostilities were definitely at an end and to obtain the release of Flight Lieutenant Glover. This should be couched in constructive terms, stressing the British desire to restore friendly relations with the new Argentine government and to be able to lift the economic and military restrictions which the conflict had made necessary.

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The Sub-Committee -

1. Invited the Defence Secretary to arrange when convenient for the remaining Argentine prisoners of war to be embarked and sailed towards Ascension Island.
2. Invited the Defence Secretary, in consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, to arrange for appropriate publicity to be given to Argentine contraventions of the relevant international Conventions in respect of minelaying by Argentine forces on the Falkland Islands.
3. Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, in consultation with the Defence Secretary, to arrange for approaches to be made to the Governments of Chile and Uruguay to seek permission for British aircraft to use Chilean and Uruguayan airfields when necessary.
4. Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to arrange for a further approach to be made to the Argentine Government along the lines indicated in the Prime Minister's summing up.

Cabinet Office

24 June 1982

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