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"Military and Political Developments in the Falkland Islands Crisis" [*declassified 07SEP2007*]

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TOP SECRET

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DCI BRIEFING PAPER

19 May 1982

Military and Political Developments
in the Falkland Islands Crisis

I. UK Military Dispositions

- A. The British now have more than 80 ships in the South Atlantic, including 16 surface combatants, four nuclear-powered submarines, 60 support ships, plus a minimum of 40 Harrier fighters and 64 helicopters.
1. About 300 troops have been aboard ships in the immediate Falkland area for some time now. The main British assault forces--consisting of some 6,000 troops--have now joined the leading element and are in position to launch attacks on the Falklands within the next day or so.
 2. Another 3,000 troops that departed on 12 May aboard the Queen Elizabeth II are expected to arrive at Ascension Island today.
 3. In all, 110 military and civilian ships have been assigned to the task force, the latest including a light cruiser, five frigates, and a large container ship.
- B. In military engagements during the past week the British have repeatedly shelled and bombed Argentine

TOP SECRET

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TOP SECRET

positions on the islands. They also have attacked three cargo ships, destroying two and damaging one. On Saturday the British successfully staged a commando raid on Pebble Island that destroyed 10 Argentine planes, including 5 Pucara ground-attack aircraft.

1. The British last Wednesday repulsed an attack against one of their frigates, apparently downing three Argentine aircraft while a fourth evidently was downed by Argentine troops. A British ship was damaged lightly when it was struck by an Argentine bomb that did not detonate and a Sea Harrier was slightly damaged on Saturday while attacking a cargo ship. The British lost a Sea King helicopter yesterday, but claimed it was not due to enemy fire.

II. Argentine Military Dispositions

- A. Most Argentine naval surface combatants have recently been in port undergoing repairs and reprovisioning.
 1. The Argentine aircraft carrier may be at sea just south of Puerto Belgrano within the 12-nautical mile limit. Two Argentine destroyers are operating just off Tierra del Fuego.

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

25X1

2. The three modern Argentine frigates were scheduled to refuel at sea yesterday. One will then return to port and the other two will take positions south of Puerto Belgrano. Argentina's two modern guided missile destroyers reportedly will be in port at Puerto Belgrano for refueling and reprovisioning over the next few days.
3. Argentina's only Guppy-class submarine may be in Puerto Belgrano, unable to submerge safely. One

25X1

- B. Argentine aircraft continue to conduct reconnaissance over areas of the South Atlantic.

25X1

- C. The Air Force has at least 25 Mirage and 32 A-4 fighters at its five southern airbases, and has recently upgraded its radar coverage along the coast. The Argentine Air Force has also continued to ship additional equipment to improve the armament of its aircraft at southern airfields.

TOP SECRET

25X1

TOP SECRET

25X1

1. Argentina's five Super Etendard naval strike aircraft were recently moved to northern airfields, but may already have returned to the south to be ready to meet an anticipated British seaborne assault.
- D. There are 12-13,000 Argentine troops on the Falklands. They are equipped with tank destroyers, 105mm howitzers, at least one 155mm howitzer, armored personnel carriers, antiaircraft artillery, and surface-to-air missiles.
1. Most of the troops occupy easily defensible terrain in the Port Stanley area of East Falkland Island.
 2. Some 2,000 are on West Falkland Island in two relatively isolated garrisons. There are indications that units on West Falkland have begun more aggressive patrolling in the last few days.
- E. British bombardment of the islands has damaged the runways and cut off many supplies from the mainland, but has caused few casualties to the garrison or to its equipment.
1. Without resupply, food rations for the 9,600 army personnel could begin to run out soon.

4

TOP SECRET

25X1

TOP SECRET

2. The garrison is also short of cold-weather gear, and units living in field conditions may begin having trouble keeping warm and dry.
3. Medical difficulties--notably influenza and gastroenteritis--are also becoming a problem.

III. British Strategy and Objectives

- A. The British appear to be positioning their forces to mount significant ground operations against the Falklands sometime this week. They have control of the seas and should be able to achieve local air superiority provided they conduct their landings at night or under adverse weather conditions.

Nonetheless, the 6,000-man assault force is outnumbered more than two to one by Argentine troops, and the UK does not have the necessary numbers of assault landing craft and helicopters to land their troops in a single, full-scale amphibious assault.

1. The British might elect to land their assault troops on East Falkland where the bulk of Argentine forces on the islands have been deployed.
2. Supported by a minimum of 40 Harrier jets, some 60 helicopters as well as naval bombardment, British troops could land on a lightly defended

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

beach and consolidate forces before attacking Argentine main forces near Port Stanley.

3. The attack would be a high-risk venture, since Argentine forces in East Falkland are in prepared defensive positions and the British lack even numerical equality.
4. Alternatively, the British could first try to establish a foothold somewhere on the lightly defended West Falkland Island.
5. British assault forces would be within range of Argentine aircraft based on the mainland, however, and would be particularly vulnerable to Argentine air attack if visibility were good during the critical ship-to-shore phase.
6. The immediate objective of British forces after a successful landing probably would be to bring some of the Harriers ashore and, together with combat troops, seek out and destroy Argentine force concentrations on West Falkland.

B. A successful retaking of West Falkland probably would be followed rapidly by continuous raids against Argentine positions and equipment throughout East Falkland. Mobile raiding forces, Harriers, and naval combatants would all be used to attack Argentine forces.

6

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

1. Military objectives of these attacks would be to weaken Argentine forces by destroying key weapon systems, particularly aircraft and helicopters, along with radars, air defense weapons, and logistics stores.
2. In addition to weakening and demoralizing the Argentines, the British almost certainly would use raiding parties to probe their adversary in an attempt to gauge the latter's ability to respond to and defend against combined-arms attacks.
3. Following this softening-up process, the numerically inferior British assault forces might decide to engage the Argentine forces around Port Stanley in an attempt to achieve a rapid and decisive victory.
4. If the Argentines manage to sink British ships during the invasion, there is a strong possibility that British submarines will attack Argentine naval forces without regard to whether the ships are in the 12-mile limit or not. The Argentine carrier probably will be the principal target.

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

IV. Possible Argentine Military Strategy

- A. Although the Argentine surface fleet has adopted a defensive strategy since the sinking of the cruiser Belgrano, it is likely that Argentine Air Force and Navy fighter aircraft and Argentine submarines would be used aggressively against any large-scale British attempt to retake the Falklands.
1. Argentine Air Force officers have frequently discussed the possibility of mounting concerted attacks against approaching British forces.
 2. Such attacks could include joint operations by virtually the entire Argentine Air Force, naval aircraft, and submarines, aimed at disrupting the British before or during an amphibious assault. Air Force Mirage jets have recently been practicing mock attacks on surface units.
 - a. The two British aircraft carriers and the troopship Canberra would be particularly attractive targets for the Argentines. The loss of, or heavy damage to, the carriers by submarine or air attack would seriously hamper British naval operations; a successful attack against the Canberra almost certainly would force the UK to call off any large-scale amphibious assault.

TOP SECRET

25X1

TOP SECRET

b. Despite the heavy toll that British defenses could be expected to exact on Argentine forces, Buenos Aires may be willing to pay the price provided it thinks there is a reasonable expectation that such an attack would seriously disrupt or fatally cripple the overall British operation.

- B. The Argentine strategy may therefore be to employ its fighter aircraft and submarines to inflict politically unacceptable losses on the British while at the same time relying on the numerical advantage of its ground forces on the island to retain all or a substantial part of the territory in dispute.
- C. The Argentines' confidence that British forces lack the capability in the short term to dislodge them from the island partly underlies their diplomatic strategy. They believe that in the wake of a British invasion effort they could seek a UN cease-fire in place that would ultimately improve their negotiating posture, and that the British would bear much of the onus for the loss of life.
- D. Ranking Argentine military leaders recognize that over the longer term, British military superiority would enable the UK to retake the Falklands. At this point, however, there is hope for ultimate

TOP SECRET

25X1

TOP SECRET

25X1

diplomatic intervention. Even if the diplomatic gambit fails, naval leader Anaya and others seem prepared to accept very high casualties to defend what they perceive as national honor.

V. Argentine Attitude Toward Negotiations

- A. Buenos Aires has apparently decided to seek major revisions to the latest British peace proposals under the guise of narrowing substantive differences. Argentina thereby hopes to maintain a posture of diplomatic flexibility.
1. The Argentine response to the British plan calls for provisions Buenos Aires almost certainly must suspect will be rejected by London. It stipulates all forces withdrawing to home ports; provides Argentines with free access to the Falklands during an interim administration; and calls for a possible role for the UN General Assembly.
- B. Having dropped its demand for explicit recognition of Argentine sovereignty as a precondition of negotiations, Buenos Aires is not prepared to make other major concessions.
1. The Argentines fear that further compromise would be read by the public as capitulation to the British.

10

TOP SECRET

25X1

TOP SECRET

C. Argentina is attempting, however, to shift blame for any diplomatic standoff to the British and shore up diplomatic support.

1. By continuing to submit counter-proposals, Argentina hopes to force Britain to bear the onus of breaking off negotiations.
2. If the British invade, the Argentines will seek a cease-fire from the UN Security Council and the British may have to veto it, further strengthening Buenos Aires' diplomatic case.
3. Argentina's OAS Ambassador reportedly plans to reconvene the Organ of Consultation under the Rio Treaty to seek reaffirmation of hemispheric solidarity and a resolution calling on all signatories not to assist the UK--a move aimed at forcing the US to chose between backing London or supporting the Rio Treaty.

VI. The Argentine Political Scene

- A. Marked escalation of hostilities will strengthen Galtieri's political position in the short term.
1. Even military officers unhappy with Galtieri's handling of the crisis would back him, as has been the case as the confrontation has widened.
 2. Most civilians are highly nationalistic on the Falklands issue and see no alternative to squarely backing the regime.

TOP SECRET

3. Pressure on Galtieri from civilian and military hardliners, has probably convinced him that even a costly military confrontation with the British is less risky politically than an unsatisfactory agreement.
4. A prolonged struggle where Argentine troops are stranded on the Falklands and ship and aircraft losses are high could undermine his position, however.
- B. There is increasing public discussion about the configuration of a post-crisis government.
1. The government has apparently decided to form various military-civilian joint commissions to serve as focal points for discussing reforms.
 2. Political parties are already gearing up for what they believe will be a speeded-up election schedule, whether or not the government triumphs over the British.
 3. Several potential candidates for elected office, however, are linked to discredited past regimes and many in the military may resist relinquishing power to old enemies.
 4. If Galtieri somehow emerges as a winner from his Falklands gamble, he would probably plan to run for President. His ultimate political fate

12

TOP SECRET

25X1

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Page Denied

Next 2 Page(s) In Document Denied

Top Secret
252