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OD(SA)(82) 29th 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
Chequers on
SUNDAY 9 MAY 1982 at 3.00 pm

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

Mr Cranley Onslow MP
Minister of State,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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

Sir Antony Acland
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Mr J R Freeland
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Sir Michael Palliser
Cabinet Office

SECRETARIAT

Sir Robert Armstrong
Mr R L Wade-Gery
Brigadier J A C G Eyre

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1. DIPLOMATIC ISSUES

The Sub-Committee had in front of them telegrams nos. 679 and 685-6 from the United Kingdom Mission to the United Nations in New York; and the draft of a telegram in reply (since issued as Foreign and Commonwealth Office telegram no. 371 to New York).

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that following the collapse of the United States Peruvian initiative hopes for a negotiated settlement were at present focussed on the United Nations. The draft telegram of instructions to Sir Antony Parsons in New York was approved, subject to a number of detailed modifications. It was important to adopt a positive stance towards the current negotiations at the United Nations. They would need to be brought to a conclusion within about a week. But there were clearly some points on which no concessions would be possible. It would be necessary to consider further, perhaps on 11 May, what were Britain's minimum requirements in any interim settlement under United Nations auspices. It might also be desirable to send someone from London who could brief Sir Antony Parsons orally on Ministerial thinking on the many delicate issues involved.

The Sub-Committee -

Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to send urgent instructions to the British Representative at the United Nations on the lines indicated by the Prime Minister in her summing up.

2. MILITARY ISSUES

THE CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE STAFF briefed the Sub-Committee on the latest military situation.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that further consideration would need to be given to the problem posed by Argentine non-combat aircraft carrying out maritime surveillance of British units which were on passage to the Falklands area and lacked air cover. Such surveillance posed a real threat; but authority to shoot down the aircraft involved could only be given if it was clear that innocent or neutral aircraft would not be shot down by mistake. Meanwhile new Rules of Engagement were approved for the air defence of Ascension Island.

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Under these all unidentified aircraft approaching Ascension would be identified by any means available; any aircraft committing a hostile act might be destroyed; any Argentine combat aircraft within 100 nautical miles of Ascension might also be destroyed; but Argentine non-combat aircraft might only be destroyed if they were heading for Ascension, were within 25 miles of Wideawake Airfield, failed to comply with visual intercept signals and ignored warning shots.

The Sub-Committee -

1. Invited the Defence Secretary to make considered proposals on how to deal with Argentine non-combat aircraft engaged in maritime surveillance of British units when British air cover was not available.
2. Invited the Defence Secretary to authorise Rules of Engagement for the air defence of Ascension Island on the basis indicated by the Prime Minister in her summing up.

Cabinet Office

10 May 1982

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