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ODO (SA) (82) 39

13 MAY 1982

CABINET

DEFENCE AND OVERSEAS POLICY (OFFICIAL) COMMITTEE

SUB-COMMITTEE ON THE SOUTH ATLANTIC AND THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

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INTERNATIONAL REACTION TO THE ARGENTINE INVASION  
OF THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

Note by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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1. As of midday on 13 May the situation was as follows. American support, both in terms of Congressional and public opinion, remains firm, ambivalent statements by President Reagan notwithstanding. The US announcement of limited economic sanctions against Argentina on 30 April and her identification with the UK position generally has however eroded her position in Latin America. Commonwealth (especially old Commonwealth) support is also firm.
2. The sinking of the General Belgrano was initially received with consternation by our EC partners, though they have been reassured by the continuing talks under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General. They continue to show some apprehension about possible military escalation, but it now seems likely (although by no means certain) that they will agree to an extension of economic sanctions against Argentina, if required. However, a further major military engagement would make this less likely. The European Parliament debated the crisis for a second time on 12 May and passed by a large majority a resolution inviting the Foreign Ministers to renew the Community embargoes if no solution to the crisis had been reached by 16 May. During the debate the President of the

/Commission

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Commission, M. Thorn, confirmed that the Commission would be putting forward a proposal to maintain the import embargo. The support of the Irish and the Italians remains doubtful, however, and would be adversely affected by any significant military initiative by the UK or serious loss of life. Other countries in Western Europe continue to be helpful. Even the Spanish, who support the Argentine claim have offered to assist in the search for a peaceful solution.

3. Opinion in Latin America, both public and official, has hardened against us since the sinking of the General Belgrano and the extension of the TEZ. There has been a tendency for Latin American opinion to unite against a supposed Anglo-Saxon alliance, from which even relatively well-disposed countries like Mexico are not exempt. There have been some anti-British demonstrations though nothing on a serious scale. Latin American governments are increasingly anxious to see an early peaceful settlement. Both Panama and Venezuela have spoken about a possible break in diplomatic relations but have taken no action against us. Nor has any Latin American country yet shown any real disposition to take economic steps against us. Some governments (e.g. Venezuela) have offered Argentina military assistance in the form of equipment. Venezuela has also demonstrated her political support by sending an official party delegation to Buenos Aires. (The Colombians have suggested that Venezuela is canvassing support for Argentina elsewhere in Latin America.) Brazil has sold Argentina two long-range reconnaissance aircraft, but further sales seem unlikely as Brazil remains unwilling to make a significant contribution to Argentina's military capacity. Peru has been particularly outspoken in its criticism of the Belgrano incident, on which it has publicly blamed the breakdown of its peace initiative. Peru nevertheless wishes to maintain an even-handed approach in order to retain its role as a potential mediator; (this position is beneficial to us, as the Secretary-General of the UN is himself a Peruvian). Chile, Colombia and Mexico remain neutral.

/Colombia

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Colombia has made it clear privately that she deplored the action against the General Belgrano, which has made her critical stance against Argentina all the harder to maintain. Chile has earned gratitude from Argentina for her help in the rescue of the Belgrano survivors.

4. The Soviet Union has intensified its propaganda support for Argentina. The Soviet Ambassador in Buenos Aires called on the Argentine Foreign Minister immediately following the US announcement of limited economic sanctions on 30 April. None of the Soviet commentaries so far has included any overt threat to us, or promises of active assistance for Argentina. The Soviet Union seems happy, for the present, to take advantage of the propaganda opportunities inherent in the situation, depicting ourselves and our NATO allies as colonialists and US lackeys, and denouncing US policies towards Latin America. Cuban support for the Argentine position has also increased and Fidel Castro has used his position as Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement to urge non-aligned states to help delay British action against Argentina. At a recent routine non-aligned meeting a resolution was adopted implying support for Argentina. We have been told by a number of the countries concerned that the resolution does not represent their real views.

5. The Chinese have continued their opposition to our military action, and support the Argentine claim but this at least in part reflects their wish not to be left behind by the Soviet Union and also their position within the Non-Aligned Movement. The Japanese have announced some limited economic sanctions but are still avoiding significant support for our position. The rest of the world remains generally non-committal, with some African countries (Senegal, Sierra Leone and Gambia) providing practical help in the form of staging facilities. Several Commonwealth African countries including Nigeria and Kenya have made forthright public statements of support for our position.

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