

Ref: A08411

SECRET AND PERSONAL

MR. WHITMORE

Falklands: Decisions Timetable

Since my minute of 10th May (A08373) the COBR briefing on the landing has been moved to 8.00 am on Friday, 14th May. Meetings and decisions thereafter are complicated by the fact that the Prime Minister and the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary will be in Scotland until the evening of Saturday 15th May; and Mr. Pym is then due to leave for the Luxembourg NATO meeting (at which Mr. Haig will be present) at 3.00 pm on Sunday, 16th May, returning only at lunchtime on Tuesday, 18th May; and that he may have to leave London earlier on Sunday if he has also to fit in an EC meeting on sanctions renewal (nothing is yet fixed).

2. This suggests that OD(SA) should meet immediately after the Prime Minister's Questions on Tuesday, 18th May, to take a decision on the landing, unless either the earliest landing date has by then slipped because of adverse weather, as it may; or the United Nations negotiations have produced an agreement.

3. The only time OD(SA) could meet with Mr. Pym present between Friday morning and Tuesday afternoon looks like being Sunday morning (unless he is then at an EC sanctions meeting). Subject to emergencies (in which case Mr. Pym would have to be represented by Sir Antony Acland) I recommend that at this stage we fix no OD(SA) meetings in that period.

4. Thereafter I suggest OD(SA) should resume its daily meetings at 9.30 am, with other sessions arranged ad hoc if necessary. Once a landing had begun, OD(SA) might need to meet in the COBR, so that any major military developments which were reported to London during meetings could be fed in via the CCTV.

5. This leaves the problem when and how far to consult the Cabinet. We have Cabinet meetings provisionally arranged for 11.00 am on Tuesday, 18th May and 10.30 am on Thursday, 20th May. Mr. Pym will not be present on the Tuesday morning, unless summoned home early from Luxembourg

SECRET AND PERSONAL



SECRET AND PERSONAL

(which could be bad for security); but the meeting on Thursday morning would be two days after the landing decision had to be taken by OD(SA), if the landing was to take place at the earliest possible time. The morning of Thursday, 20th May would be before a landing could actually go in. In theory, if the Cabinet was told of the landing plan on Thursday, 20th May and reacted adversely, the plan could be cancelled or postponed; but by that time our forces would have spent $1\frac{1}{2}$ days exposing themselves to danger, in preparation for it. At the Cabinet meeting on 22nd April the Secretary of State for the Environment, with general support, specifically asked that the Cabinet should be consulted before the landing was finally authorised. The Prime Minister's reply left it open whether they would actually be consulted before the decision or merely told about it before execution. At today's meeting it seemed to be generally accepted that it would be for OD(SA) to take the decision, but the Prime Minister did not rule out the possibility of informing the Cabinet, if a suitable opportunity arose at a meeting called in the ordinary course of business, or at a time when Parliament was sitting.

6. If the negotiations in New York had not by early next week led to an agreement, or unless the weather forces a slow-down in the military timetable, the options would be -

- (a) to ask Mr. Pym to return early on the morning of Tuesday, 18th May, in order to attend a decision-taking meeting of OD(SA) followed by a decision-ratifying meeting of the Cabinet;
- (b) to tell Cabinet only on Thursday, 20th May;
- (c) to refuse to give the military their green light until Wednesday, 19th May (i.e. 24 hours after they want), at the risk of postponing the earliest time at which a landing can take place, and postpone Tuesday's Cabinet meeting until then.

From the point of view of military secrecy (b) would be preferable; non-OD(SA) colleagues would then only know of the landing decision about 12 hours before the landing takes place, rather than $2\frac{1}{2}$ days ahead.

Robert Armstrong

13th May 1982

-2-

SECRET AND PERSONAL

My strong preference is for Thursday.
RA