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Mr Weston, Defence Department

CHIEFS OF STAFF MEETING: 17 APRIL

1. The following points of interest to the FCO arose at this morning's Chiefs of Staff meeting. I am recording a discussion on Chile and Gibraltar separately.

a. Intelligence Assessment

DCDS(I) reported little change in the intelligence assessment of Argentine naval dispositions. The MOD were examining the possibility that the Naval auxiliaries and patrol boats within the Maritime Exclusion Zone might be mine laying, though it was difficult to judge whether reports of this were genuine or deliberate deception.

b. Progress of the Task Force

The Chief of Naval Staff (in the chair) reported that an additional submarine should be on station by 19 April and that elements of the main force for operation PARAQUET should be on station by 21 April. I said that I understood that the Cabinet Office had asked for a forecast of the Task Force's progress to be prepared for Ministers to see on 19 April, and it was confirmed that work was in hand for this. The Chief of Naval Staff emphasised the need for the military and political timetables to be closely co-ordinated. I endorsed this, while pointing out that the political timetable was unfortunately very difficult to forecast. I emphasised that Ministers would increasingly need to be kept closely informed on when which elements of the task force could be expected to arrive where.

c. Public Relations

Mr McDonald referred to press accusations that the FCO were 'gagging' Falkland Islanders returning to this country, and commented that there would be advantage, where possible, in using Brize Norton rather than Gatwick.

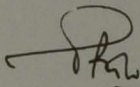
/Mr McDonald

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Mr McDonald also thought that the imminent return of SUPERB to Faslane would give rise to questions about the numbers of submarines on station. It was agreed that the general line to take with the press should be that they would not expect us to comment on the movement of our submarines in the current operation.

Mr McDonald also thought that the further requisitioning of shipping might create considerable press interest. It was agreed that such stories should be played down as far as possible (in line with the effort, agreed yesterday, that we should try to defuse the crisis atmosphere) and the Chief of Naval Staff proposed that he might have a word with some of the retired Admirals who have been placing rather sensational articles in the press.



17 April 1982

P R H WRIGHT

Copied to:  
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