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OD(SA)(82) 23rd 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 2 MAY 1982 at 2.30 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 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

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

Admiral Sir Henry Leach
Chief of Naval Staff and
First Sea Lord

General Sir Edwin Bramall
Chief of the General Staff

Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Beetham
Chief of the Air Staff

Admiral Sir John Fieldhouse
Commander-in-Chief Fleet

Sir Antony Acland
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Sir Frank Cooper
Ministry of Defence

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. MILITARY ISSUES

The Sub-Committee had before them a memorandum by the Defence Secretary (OD)(SA)(82) 39) on force levels and reinforcement, and a note by the Secretaries (OD(SA)(82) 40) covering a note by the Ministry of Defence on reinforcement and ship requisitioning.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that at an ad hoc meeting earlier that day members of the Sub-Committee and the Attorney General had decided that, in the light of the latest intelligence about the movements and intentions of the Argentine fleet and of the new situation created by the military events of 1 May, British forces should forthwith be authorised to attack any Argentine naval vessel (but not naval auxiliaries) on the same basis as had been approved on 29 April in the case of the Argentine aircraft carrier (OD(SA)(82) 22nd Meeting, Conclusion 1); ie they might attack any such vessel unless it was either within internationally recognised territorial waters of 12 nautical miles or both north of latitude 35° South and west of longitude 48° West. It was now agreed that Argentine naval auxiliaries might also be attacked on the same basis if in the judgement of the Defence Secretary this became necessary. The Defence Secretary's reinforcement proposals were approved, and it was reluctantly accepted that these made the requisitioning of the ss Queen Elizabeth II unavoidable.

The Sub-Committee -

1. Took note that British forces had been authorised to attack any Argentine naval vessel on the basis indicated by the Prime Minister in her summing up.
2. Invited the Defence Secretary to decide at his discretion whether to extend this authorisation to cover also Argentine naval auxiliaries.
3. Invited the Defence Secretary to make arrangements for reinforcement and associated ship requisitioning on the basis proposed in OD(SA)(82) 39 and 40.

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2. POLITICAL ISSUES

The Sub-Committee had before them a note by the Secretaries (OD(SA)(82) 41) covering a note by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the response to a possible declaration of war by Argentina.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said it was clear that if Argentina declared war certain procedures would need to be followed by Britain and there would be certain formal consequences. Meanwhile urgent consideration should be given to what more needed to be done to step up the quality and quantity of vernacular and English language broadcasts audible by listeners both in Argentina and in the Falkland Islands; the cost of this was to be regarded as legitimate additional expenditure in the context of current military operations, and American technical help might be sought if required. It would also be necessary to consider, perhaps with the International Committee of the Red Cross, what arrangements should be made for the removal of Argentine prisoners who might be captured as a result of military operations. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary was expected to return to London the following evening and would need to report to an early meeting of the Sub-Committee on his visit to Washington and New York.

The Sub-Committee

1. Took note of OD(SA)(82) 41.
2. Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to consider the question of broadcasts to Argentina and the Falkland Islands on the basis indicated by the Prime Minister in her summing up.
3. Invited the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, in consultation with the Defence Secretary, to consider how to dispose of future Argentine prisoners, as indicated by the Prime Minister in her summing up.
4. Agreed to resume their discussion at 0900 on 4 May.

Cabinet Office

4 May 1982

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