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MR COLES

I attach a draft speaking note for
tomorrow's Cabinet, as requested.

RLW

19th May 1982

R L WADE-GERY

c Sir Robert Armstrong



Draft Speaking Note for the Prime Minister's use at Cabinet

The Chiefs of Staff were consulted on the basis that it was for the Ministers most closely concerned - ie the OD(SA) Sub-Committee - to decide whether to authorise military operations to repossess the Falklands; but that it was for the Chiefs of Staff to advise on whether such operations were militarily feasible, and if so on how best they should be conducted.

The advice received from the Chiefs of Staff was unanimous. They agreed with the Force Commander (ie the Commander-in-Chief Fleet, Admiral Sir John Fieldhouse) that repossession was militarily feasible, and that the plan which he had devised for achieving it represented the best option available; and they were confident it could be successfully carried through. They agreed with him that a prolonged blockade of the Islands was not a viable option; that a landing in force would therefore be necessary; and that this should take place at an early moment of his choosing, in the light of local circumstances including the weather. Once ashore they were confident that our forces would be able to press ahead in order to achieve either satisfactory conditions for a ceasefire and Argentine withdrawal or the surrender of the Argentine garrison. // They hope that an Argentine collapse following the landing will make it unnecessary to use force to complete repossession of the Islands; but they are satisfied that the latter course would if necessary be possible. They are aware that once landing and repossession operations begin there will be intense international and other pressure for a ceasefire; and therefore that the longer such operations take, the harder it will be to secure the objectives desired.

The Chiefs of Staff have not sought to disguise that risks will be involved, as in all military operations. But they regard the risks as militarily acceptable. The risks will be most severe at the time of the landing, with air attack as the main danger. Attrition of



Argentine air and naval forces has been less than was hoped, because they have so largely stayed in or near their bases. If the Argentines launch an all-out air offensive against the landing, when British ships will be in a known position and within range, full air defence of British forces cannot be guaranteed; some aircraft would be liable to get through and further naval losses could occur. But the landing plan takes full account of this danger and is designed to minimise it. Because air superiority is one of the principles of modern war and has not yet been achieved, the Chiefs of Staff see larger risks in the early stages of the landing than would normally be considered appropriate in an operation of this sort. But they believe that these risks should be taken and any resulting casualties to troops and ships accepted. The Chiefs of Staff cannot tell us what losses we shall in fact suffer; but they believe that these will be militarily tolerable.

Once the landing is established the Chiefs of Staff expect the risks to decrease markedly, although in certain circumstances British forces could face problems of attrition, both on land and in enforcing the Total Exclusion Zone to prevent Argentine resupply.

The Attorney General's advice is that the military operations now contemplated are legally compatible with the self-defence provisions of Article 51 of the United Nations Charter and with Security Council Resolution no. 502.

19th May 1982