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OD(SA)(82) 28th 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
10 Downing Street on
FRIDAY 7 MAY 1982 at 9.45 am and 12 noon

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 Francis Pym MP
Secretary of State for Foreign
and Commonwealth Affairs

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 Michael Havers QC MP
Attorney General

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

Sir Antony Acland
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Sir Michael Palliser
Cabinet Office

SECRETARIAT

Sir Robert Armstrong
Mr R L Wade-Gery
Mr R L L Facer
Brigadier J A C G Eyre

SUBJECT

SITUATION IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC

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SITUATION IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC

The Sub-Committee had before them the draft of a statement to be made by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary in the House of Commons that morning.

THE CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE STAFF briefed the Sub-Committee on the current military situation.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that the text of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's statement had been agreed, with certain changes, during the first part of the Sub-Committee's session. It was also agreed that British Special Forces operating in the Falkland Islands might now attack civil installations and Argentine personnel, as well as military installations as authorised on 30 April (OD(SA)(82) 21st Meeting, Item 2). It was essential that British forces should be so far as possible safeguarded from Argentine attack, both in the area of the Falklands and along their supply lines. The Argentine aircraft carrier had the capability to threaten the Falklands area or the British supply lines even if it was within the excluded area agreed following the Sub-Committee's discussion on 6 May (OD(SA)(82) 26th Meeting, Item 1, Conclusion 1), viz high seas lying both north of latitude 44° South and west of a line 200 nautical miles from the Argentine coast. Similar considerations applied to other Argentine warships, given the difficulty of monitoring their movements, and to military aircraft. A public statement should therefore be issued by the Ministry of Defence later that day, which should recall the Government's earlier warnings on 23 and 29 April and the terms of the announcement of the Total Exclusion Zone and should go on to make clear that because of the proximity of Argentine bases and the distances that hostile forces could cover undetected, particularly at night and in bad weather, any Argentine warship or military aircraft found more than 12 nautical miles from the Argentine coast would be regarded as hostile and was liable to be dealt with accordingly. After a suitable interval had elapsed following this warning, British forces should be authorised to attack any such Argentine warship or military aircraft accordingly. The warning should be transmitted to the

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Argentine Government through the Swiss, communicated to the United Nations; and given maximum international publicity by British missions overseas. More generally, it was important that the Government's stance on both diplomatic and military issues should be fully and fairly presented by the media, particularly television. The Home Secretary had made this point privately to the Chairman of the British Broadcasting Corporation, who had responded helpfully. On the diplomatic side, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's Parliamentary statement and subsequent press conference were likely to be given wide coverage. The Defence Secretary was making arrangements for the Chief of the Defence Staff to appear on television during a visit to Fleet Headquarters later that day, and would probably be being interviewed himself later in the weekend. It would be helpful if arrangements could be made for a group of military experts, eg retired officers of appropriate experience and standing, and representatives of respected professional institutes, to be suitably briefed by the Ministry of Defence and available for media comment. Comment from City of London sources on Argentina's serious economic situation might also be of value.

The Sub-Committee -

1. Took note with approval of the terms of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's Parliamentary statement that day.
2. Invited the Defence Secretary to authorise Special Forces' direct action operations against targets in all 3 categories identified in OD(SA)(82) 33.
3. Invited the Defence Secretary, in consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Attorney General, to prepare and promulgate a warning announcement about Argentine warships and military aircraft on the lines indicated by the Prime Minister in her summing up.
4. Invited the Defence Secretary, in consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, to decide how soon after the warning announcement British forces could be authorised to attack any Argentine warship or military aircraft found more than 12 nautical miles from the coast of Argentina, and to arrange for them to be so authorised.
5. Invited the Defence Secretary to consider further the briefing of non-governmental military experts for public relations purposes, as suggested by the Prime Minister in her summing up.

Cabinet Office

7 May 1982

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