

SECRET

Prime Minister 1 (2)

Argentina A.J.C. 12/3



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
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MO 5/21

12th March 1982

Dear John,

ms

k.a. 15/3

FALKLANDS ISLANDS

The Prime Minister indicated to Mr Nott on Monday evening that she would like to know how quickly RN ships could be deployed to the Falkland Islands. Separately you have written to John Holmes suggesting that the paper which Lord Carrington will put to OD in the near future should address the question of contingency planning. This is in hand and my letter deals only with the limited question of ship deployments.

As to frigates the West Indies guardship, HMS LONDONERRY, is up to 3 weeks sailing time from the Falkland islands. She is, however, essentially a trials ship and carries limited close range armaments. Moreover, she has no dedicated tanker support, so that if ports on the South American coast were denied to her she could not reach the Falklands. This consideration would also apply to the frigate ANDROMEDA currently undergoing trials in the Bahamas.

There are, as the Prime Minister observed, RN ships participating in the NATO Exercise SAFE PASS 82, which continues until 18th March in the Gulf of Mexico and off the Eastern Seaboard of the United States. They are the frigate HMS DANAE (part of STANAVFORLANT) and the nuclear-powered submarine HMS COURAGEOUS. Deployment of HMS DANAE to the Falklands would run into the same problems as that of HMS LONDONERRY; although a tanker is in attendance it is servicing STANAVFORLANT as a whole and is in any case not a British vessel.

In short, if a frigate were to be deployed to the Falklands, RFA support would also be necessary. Passage time whether from the Caribbean or the UK would be in the order of 20 days. Maintenance of one frigate on station on a semi-permanent, deterrent basis would, in practice, require the deployment of two, in order to allow for maintenance and serviceability.

To complete the picture the Prime Minister will be aware that the Ice Patrol vessel HMS ENDURANCE is at present operating in the region. She is currently off Adelaide Island, within 3 days sailing

A J Coles Esq



time from Port Stanley. She will remain in the South Atlantic until mid-April before returning to the UK. ENDURANCE carries two Wasp helicopters armed with close range missiles and is herself armed with two 20mm Oerlikon guns. The Prime Minister will also know of the permanent Falklands Garrison comprising 42 Royal Marines; they are equipped with light infantry weapons. The annual roulement of the detachment is scheduled to take place between 24th March and 5th April.

I am copying this letter to John Holmes.

*Yours sincerely*

*Nick Evans*

(N H R EVANS)



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COPIED