

MEETING OF INFORMATION GROUP ON THE FALKLANDS

4 PM MONDAY 3 MAY 1982

Present:

B Ingham - No 10  
P Brazier - COI  
I McDonald - MoD  
R Westbrook - FCO  
D Colvin - Cabinet Office  
S Fuller - Presentation Unit  
R Hatfield - Presentation Unit  
H Colver - No 10.

MoD reported on the current situation and referred particularly to the flow of information. There was some embarrassment that journalists with the Task Force were relaying more detailed information than was coming out officially. A policy had now been adopted whereby control of reports from journalists with the Task Force was exercised on the spot rather than at MoD. The essential work on security was therefore done at the Task Force end. Guidance had been given to editors and journalists four weeks ago and, of course, it was possible to employ D Notices where relevant as well as apply gentle pressures. The particular difficulty over telephoned dispatches was recognised. Television pictures at present presented little difficulty since there was no way of getting them back to the UK. It was recognised that the information coming from journalists with the Task Force - particularly their evidence of seeing all Sea Harriers return from the airport raids and their subsequent sight of the reconnaissance photographs - was valuable. Against that had to be placed such events as the naming of the submarine involved in the cruiser action.

On the cruiser action, it was noted that there was some confusion over whether or not the vessel was inside the zone or just outside. Whichever, the defence zone was, of course, operative.

It was agreed that in terms of credibility the availability of pictures showing the damage to the airfields was important. MoD thought there was little chance of receiving any pictures for a week since aircraft, even if available, could not reach Ascension. It was therefore only possible, in the absence of satellite or wiring facilities, to send the pictures by sea. The South Georgia operation pictures were travelling back in this way and it might be possible to get pictures of the airfield attack on to HMS Antrim. MoD said this would depend on operational priorities.

It was noted that the Press, including particularly the Americans, were still anxious to place a journalist/photographer with the Task Force.

The MoD reported that although the Royal Navy had recommended the call-up of reservists, this had not been taken up and was still under review.

On the Belgrano action MoD reported the vessel severely damaged but at that stage not sunk. On the question of minimum

force and the crippling as opposed to sinking of the vessel, the MoD commented that the Royal Navy "always shoots to kill". The Presentation Unit felt that it was desirable to take credit if the ship had merely been incapacitated.

On the question of casualties, the MoD could not give any figures for the action at sea. They were aware of casualty figures for the airfield attacks and commented that there were not many.

The MoD explained the use of the term "patrol boat type naval auxiliary". This vessel was an armoured tug being used as a patrol boat. Survival kit had been dropped to this vessel by RN helicopter.

MoD reported that Mr Nott would be giving a brief Press Conference at 8.30 pm that evening but was not expected to make any new announcements, simply take the opportunity to appear, particularly on British and American TV.

Concern was expressed over continued disinformation from Argentina and the way some of the media was presenting this. The Presentation Unit felt UK spokesmen should continue to emphasise the contrast between dictatorship and democracy in this context as well as losing no opportunity to explain the facts of events. It was noted that Mr Pym had been strong on this point in Washington and perhaps Mr Nott might take the opportunity of his Press Conference to pursue the point.

The MoD reported that with the announcement of the addition of the QE2 to the Task Force, there was a renewed spate of applications for pressmen to travel with the ship. MoD took the view, and the meeting agreed, that since the vessel would not be in the area for some time and the pressmen would not have anything to see or report on, it would be sensible not to take a press party. It would seem more sensible to fly pressmen to the area once the garrison was established.

The FCO reported on Mr Pym's visit to Washington and New York. Various ideas were discussed but no conclusions reached. There was no question of accepting or rejecting anything out of hand. On the Peruvian initiative, Mr Pym had taken the line that he was told by Haig of some Peruvian ideas. They had never been put to the UK and had in any case been turned down by the Argentines. It was noted that there was also a Spanish offer of mediation.

On the EC front there was misconception about the meeting of Political Directors in Brussels, some sources suggesting the EC was getting cold feet and wanted to discuss sanctions. Mr Pym had taken a strong line on this, and that was of course not the purpose of the meeting. Reported concern expressed by German and Irish representatives was noted. The EC ban had until 16 May to run and the Cabinet Office noted that in any case it was a funny time for EC support to fall off just when the Americans had come down on our side.

It was thought that Mr Pym would return by Concorde that evening and would not report immediately to the Prime Minister. There would be a meeting of OD(SA) at 9 am the following morning, and Mr Pym would be making a Statement in the House.

It was noted that the BBC's Spanish Language Service to South America was now being jammed though the English Language Service was unaffected. Given the Argentine misinformation, it was no surprise that they would try to jam the truth.

On the question of all-party meetings, it was thought that following Mr Foot's refusal of the invitation there would be no decision that day but OD(SA) would discuss in the morning. Dr Owen and Mr Steel appeared relaxed. Mr Biffen thought a meeting with them might be helpful, and if it took place it was thought Mr Pym would attend.

The Chairman summarised the overall stance against the background of recent action as one of minimum force while the search for a diplomatic way forward continued. Much depended on Argentine action. Mr Pym had not returned with anything specific.



HUGH COLVER  
4 May 1982