



11/3/82

(11)

British Embassy
BUENOS AIRES

2 March, 1982

350/492/1

*Y. But it is useful nonetheless
if has been copied to the mod.*

His Excellency My only concern is that this
Mr R M Hunt CMG *both of unbalanced assessment
could lead to unhelpful
altercations in the*
PORT STANLEY

*Mr Fearns
Mr Chase RSC
cc Defence Dept
I suspect it Amalenside
asked this to be sent. It says
nothing which we don't
already know
of, CEB*

My dear Governor,

THE ARGENTINE MILITARY THREAT TO THE FALKLANDS

Although most recent Argentine statements have dis-
counted the use of force there has also been an increase
in hard line articles in the Argentine press on the subject
of the Falkland Islands. (I enclose for DI 4 copies of
two examples by Iglesias Rouco in "La Prensa", which this
post has already sent to South America Department).

2. The notable feature in most of these is the mention
of the use of military force as a natural follow-on from
any breakdown in the current negotiations. While the
Government does not itself dictate what we read, it would
be easy enough for it - or any of its members - to inspire
sentiments of this kind on a discreet basis in order to
see what reactions they provoke (and not surprisingly to
date no criticism has been voiced): and those I have talked
to in the Military recently stress that this year is an
important one indeed for Anglo Argentine relations.

3. Putting the worst possible interpretation on things
this could mean an Army President, who has already
demonstrated his lack of patience when frustrated over
such issues (Chilean frontier closure April 1981) giving
orders to the military to solve the Malvinas problem once
and for all in the latter half of this year, and in so
doing aiming to secure at least one invitingly easy looking
point at a time when it may quite possibly seem most
attractive to him to do something popular.

4. Following my recent private visit to the Islands, we
have been giving this problem some thought here and feel
it would be useful to record what the military options
might be, and to look briefly at the intelligence problems
they pose. This paper does not address itself to non-
aggressive measures.

15.



"Shots across the bows"

5. Until and unless the talks break down the most likely threat is posed by the Navy. Possibilities for action by them are legion, but might include for example,

- i. the establishment of a Naval "research station" on an outlying island,
- ii. the helicopter landing of marines on one of the islands for a 24-hour exercise coupled perhaps with low level overflights of Port Stanley, or
- iii. the denial of access to supply ships.

Such measures would be designed to demonstrate to the Islanders how the Argentine claim to sovereignty could be backed by strength whilst our own forces could guarantee no effective protection. Successfully carried out they would not result in bloodshed, would therefore be unlikely to be condemned too harshly by others and would help to convince the United Kingdom of both the seriousness and the urgency of the problem. The Navy moreover would be politically keen to flex their muscles in an area they regard as their own and these sort of pranks would not need the support of either of the other Services - an attractive feature when the practice of joint operations is not the norm. They would not moreover be overly dependent on good weather.

"Invasion"

6. The new danger is perhaps that the Argentines might in days to come no longer believe a negotiated settlement of any sort to be possible, and therefore a military plan designed to prod Britain into talking more seriously (in however changed an atmosphere) might at that point seem to them outdated. A straight seizure of the Islands is an obvious alternative.

7. Although Navy and Marines could of course still be used in any number of ways to land a force and take Port Stanley, surprise could not be assured and the possibility would exist of quite numerous casualties being suffered by both sides. This consideration might be overriding and cause them to think instead (or additionally) of airborne delivery of a smaller specialist force at Port Stanley followed by air or sea landing of marines. One has to remember that the military coup is a fairly well practised

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art here in Argentina and it is also a fact that the Army study and admire coup de main operations of all sorts. Of course such a plan would carry high risks but the follow-on force would be available for early committal if things went wrong.

8. The obvious first task in such an assault would be the neutralisation of NP 8901's capability to react (destruction of arms, telephones, vehicles?), the capture of government communications facilities, seizure of the FIDF armoury: next would come the securing of air field and jetties. The capture of Governor and key personnel would follow and Argentine military replacements would move in.

9. Our ally in this scenario is the Falkland Island weather with its capability for rapid and unforecast changes particularly in cloud base and wind speed. Although parachute operations should not be ruled out, once the decision was taken, troops would have to be prepared to spend several days waiting for good conditions, preferably as close to the Islands as possible to reduce the possibility of still having to abort on account of changed conditions after launch. Of course accurate and timely intelligence from Port Stanley itself to the mainland presents no problem to the Argentines: our own ability to give early warning would depend upon any coverage of airfield activity in Córdoba, home of the airborne brigade, and possibly Rio Gallegos, nearest field to the Islands. With present arrangements we could not realistically hope to get any information at all. Otherwise any warning would depend on NP 8901's ability to watch the western approaches to the Islands particularly during first light on days when conditions were judged good.

10. A further conclusion which the Argentines might have drawn is that the clandestine delivery of an assault party, possibly in plain clothes and with weapons concealed on their persons, could be a simpler (and cheaper) alternative. The easiest way for the group to arrive would be piecemeal week by week by the scheduled LADE F 28 under the guise of tourists or technical personnel or by special flight made under different cover (eg in one of the Argentine Air Force C 130s which occasionally make freight deliveries). Their approach to the primary objectives (paragraph 8 above) could then be made at their convenience any time after arrival. The only intelligence which could be gained that such an attempt was being undertaken would be through the Port Stanley airport Immigration authorities' records of Argentines arriving in the Colony.

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Conclusions

11. From a Buenos Aires perspective then the following conclusions can be drawn:

- a. it would be difficult to see any operation mounted at the present stage or in the future which did not involve the Navy - and very probably the Marines;
- b. an airborne or clandestinely-mounted coup de main attempt against Port Stanley would have definite appeal to a force planning the seizure of the Islands;
- c. special arrangements could enhance our chance of providing early warning from Argentina, but at present we could not realistically expect to be able to detect any moves;
- d. important dividends can be gained by constant vigilance in the Colony itself and over its surrounding waters, as the knowledge that surprise would be hard to obtain is in itself a deterrent to a potential enemy aiming for an easy and clean win.

12. I apologise if on the basis of an all too short private visit I might have worked with incomplete knowledge on territory which is theoretically outside my area of concern (and possibly arriving at conclusions contrary to official views to which I am not privy). However, I am sure that as the diplomatic exchanges reach the crunch point, we, the intelligence machine, should be clearing our minds as far as is possible on what realistically the military threat comprises (at the same time considering how we could keep ourselves better informed upon it) - and the forces which pose this threat are very definitely of my concern.

13. We should be glad to hear any comments which you might have on all of this.

Sincerely,

Stephen Love

cc: DI 4
Ministry of Defence
South America Dept
F C O

Stephen Love (Colonel)
Defence Attaché