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CHIEFS OF STAFF MEETING: 7 MAY

The following points of interest arose at this morning's meeting of the Chiefs of Staff.

(a) Intelligence briefing. DCDSI confirmed that an approach had been made to Aerospatiale about their deliveries of Exocet to Argentina. This had confirmed that five Exocet had already been delivered but that a further five on order had not. There was to be a further visit to the factory today, and attempts would be made to ensure that no further deliveries took place.

On Argentine Navy deployments, it was confirmed that the Argentine carrier was still thought to be within 12 miles of the Argentine coast in a position to slip into Puerto Belgrano for repairs. DCDSI confirmed the MOD's assessment that, in spite of some claims to the contrary, Skyhawk aircraft with 2000 lb of bombs flying at low level would be able to reach a radius of 500 miles from the carrier.

DCDSI also displayed a map showing the flight paths of Boeing 707 reconnaissance flights over the past few days. If the pattern continued, it was possible that a further overflight today could be in the area of HMS PLYMOUTH and other ships. A suitable warning had already been passed to CINCFLEET.

On the Maritime Exclusion Zone, DCDSI confirmed the MOD's assessment that only three Argentine merchant ships have broken the MEZ (the last on 29 April) and that none has yet broken the TEZ. There were thought to be up to six ships, including three merchant ships, in Port Stanley harbour.

There was also some discussion of the report which I mentioned to the Secretary of State at this morning's meeting. The Chief of Naval Staff said that current ROEs should be adequate to deal with any fishing vessels attempting to break the TEZ. DCDSI thought that the Argentines should be able to carry the necessary resupplies in three deep water trawlers (of which there are three or four in Puerto Deseado).

On Port Stanley airfield, it was reported that no damage assessment had yet been made (a reconnaissance by Harrier may take place today). The MOD believe that the airfield is inoperable except for light aircraft.

(b) Own Troops. ACDS(Ops) reported that the Carrier Battle Group is now in the south-east sector of the TEZ. Following the Secretary of State's enquiry this morning, I asked whether this reflected a change from yesterday's position, and was told that the Carrier Battle Group had moved from the north-east to the south-east, but that the MOD did not have sufficiently precise information on our own naval deployment to say whether the Group is further from, or nearer to, the Falkland Islands. CDS showed considerable /interest

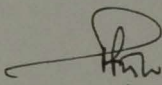
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interest in why I had asked this question, and mentioned that the Secretary of State had also asked it at OD(SA) this morning.

(c) HMS SHEFFIELD. The Chief of Naval Staff reported plans for the Special Boat Section to sink HMS SHEFFIELD today. CDS expressed considerable surprise, having been told of an earlier plan to tow HMS SHEFFIELD to South Georgia. The initial view was that publicity for this would be undesirable, but the meeting concluded that the sinking itself was bound to become known, and the only question therefore was whether the method of sinking could be revealed. The meeting also concluded that it would be better, in public relations terms, to show that we had sank HMS SHEFFIELD, rather than the Argentinians.

(d) Public Relations. The Chief of Defence Staff reported that the Prime Minister had instructed that more should be made in publicity of our success in maintaining the TEZ. The CDS proposed therefore to record an interview for television later today, at which he would try to get this point across.

There was also some discussion about ways of keeping Defence Correspondents happy; both Sir F. Cooper and Mr. McDonald reported considerable edginess among the Defence Correspondents. One suggestion made was that, with the Americans now having come off the fence, more publicity could be given to the use of Ascension Island. I said that I saw no problem with this but that we would like to be kept informed of what the MOD planned.



(P.R.H. Wright)
7 May, 1982.

cc Private Secretary
Mr. Giffard
Mr. Gillmore
Mr. Weston
Mr. Fenn.

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