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PRIME MINISTER

I mentioned to you yesterday afternoon that I had already taken a decision to charter the Canberra, a passenger liner owned by P&O. I explained to you that in spite of the political dimension I judged that we needed additional shipping for troop transport if we were to carry the maximum weapon load on HM Ships and get our men to the other end of the world in good order. The advantage of chartering such a ship is that it also enables us to embark a larger contingent than had already been planned.

2. Unfortunately further investigation during the course of yesterday afternoon has now indicated that we need to lay an order which should be done today with the Queen's approval being required the same day. Obviously this involves an even higher profile than I had wished or anticipated but I still must recommend that in the judgement of all of us in the MOD such steps are now necessary. / A note on the details is attached.

3. We would obviously have to prepare very careful briefing for the press before we laid such an order given that the first criticism will be that we have reduced the Royal Navy to such an insignificant size we cannot even carry our own troops. But since the ship would be flying the blue ensign and would be under the command of a Captain in the Royal Naval Reserves we would attempt to make it appear, as indeed is the case, a straightforward part of our emergency planning to which all Governments have subscribed.

4. Whilst I can see all the problems and disadvantages it might be wise to lay this general order pretty quickly whilst the nation and Parliament is still in a highly bellicose mood. Indeed, the

SECRET



fact of our taking general power to requisition shipping would show the urgency of the Government in meeting its objective.

5. I am copying this to the Foreign Secretary, the Lord President, the Chancellor, the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for Trade and the Attorney General.

*MHR (runs) (private secretary)*

*[ approved by Mr Mott and signed in his absence ]*

Ministry of Defence

4th April 1982