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Mr Wright

c.c. PS
PS/PUS
Sir Ian Sinclair
Mr Gillmore
Mr Giffard
Mr Fearn

CHIEFS OF STAFF COMMITTEE : 4 MAY

The following main points of interest arose during this morning's meeting, which you attended.

Intelligence Report

DCDSI noted Argentine claims that the BELGRANO had been sunk after being located with the help of US satellite information. On the military threat from Venezuela he said that the Venezuelan Navy was assessed to be in poor shape with many of its ships undergoing repair; the capability of the airforce was also doubtful. Venezuela, in his opinion, could not challenge our lines of communication effectively.

2. DCDSI said that the Argentine aircraft carrier group was in the in-shore of area Oscar, within 50 fathoms and enjoying close air cover from the mainland. The Argentine commander had apparently questioned his orders to move forward and launch air attacks and had pulled back for reasons of weather and military prudence. The frigate group north of Puerto Deseado had also drawn in closer to the coast. As for the BELGRANO group, there had been no report of destroyer activity since yesterday morning.

3. DCDSI quoted the Argentine figures that 128 survivors had been picked up from the BELGRANO crew of 1,042, but said that the manning figures for BELGRANO were uncertain and could vary between 700 and 1,200. In answer to questions from Mr Blaker, it was stated that the attack on BELGRANO had occurred at 1856Z (this is even earlier than the hour quoted in my minute to Mr Gillmore of 4 May, and strengthens the point made there about the very rapid communication with the SSN). Search operations had apparently been delayed until five hours later by which time darkness had fallen: no doubt the explanation was that the destroyers had been engaging in ASW operations, given that the BELGRANO had not sunk immediately. The two Argentine 209 submarines were still at large, whereabouts unknown. Neptune maritime patrol aircraft had subsequently carried out ASW flights over the area, armed with torpedoes.

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4. In answer to your question, no-one present could state whether the BELGRANO had in fact entered the TEZ before the attack, but at the time she was hit she was heading West at 280°. CNS said that the fleet commander had given an explicit instruction that the Argentine destroyers accompanying BELGRANO should not be attacked, so as to permit the picking up of survivors.

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Public Relations

5. You reminded the Committee of the need to keep our Allies informed by regular briefings of service attaches, in order to pre-empt grumbling from these quarters. ACDS Pol said that a further briefing of NATO defence attaches had been organised for Thursday this week. CDS added that he would be talking to NATO Chiefs of Staff today and tomorrow, and that he had also written at length to his French opposite number. Mr Nott would also be appearing at the DPC.

6. CNS said that in the 'new phase' of hostilities there were likely to be 'slips' by the media reporters on board the Task Force and he therefore proposed that their reports should be channelled via the MOD and not filed direct to editors. Sir Frank Cooper said there were arguments on both sides but he would have this looked at again. He would be meeting newspaper editors later this week and would in any case want to tell them what we were doing on this point.

*Paragraph 7 deleted and retained under Section 3(4).
Wayland;
11 September 2012*

Defence of Ascension

8. The adviser team's report had been received last night and the Force Commander there would signal his recommendations today. Subject to these, the proposal was that the RAF regiment should provide the Headquarters wing (10 men) plus a flight (31 men) for quick reaction alert (they could arrive by 5 May); air defence early warning radar could also be procured at 48 hours' notice, there could be increased NIMROD activity after 7 May and until the guardship arrived on 10 May.

There was also a possibility of using reserve Harriers there in an air defence role. In all a total of 60 extra men on the island would probably be needed. CNS urged prompt action because of the risk as he saw it of an 'Entebbe type raid'.

US Assistance

9. ACDS Pol said there was a need to address this as far as possible through normal channels, together with a high level political approach to establish the context. Priority areas were intelligence, supply of equipment and logistic and operational support. CDS said that he would take the matter up in general terms today and tomorrow with General Jones (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs) and Mr Nott would raise it with Weinberger during the DPC. It was accepted that BDS Washington would have a role to play, but probably not for actual procurement. CNS said he was against the lend lease idea for items such as assault ships. In general it was thought too early to enter into the kind of detail invited by the agenda paper.

P J Weston

P J Weston
Defence Department

4 May, 1982