

LOSS MINUTE

D/DS5/3/5/71

DS11 (Mr Bowen)

SECRET

NS 11/17
10/6
18 MAR 1982
3/45k

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

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FALKLAND ISLANDS

Reference:

A. D/DS11/10/6 of 9 March 1982.

1. We have, in consultation with the Naval Staff, re-examined the MOD position paper on the defence of the Falkland Islands circulated under cover of the Reference.
2. Although reports in the Argentine press would indicate a stiffening of Argentine resolve to conclude quickly, if necessary by the use of force, a satisfactory settlement of the long-standing Sovereignty dispute, telegrams from the Ambassador in Buenos Aires reporting on his several discussions with Argentine Ministers suggest that there is no firm evidence to dissent from the conclusions of the current JIC assessment of the threat to the Islands. Indeed, Costa Mendez is reported as denying that the Argentine Government wished in any way to threaten, and admitting with regret that there was little they could do to prevent unhelpful press treatment.
3. On balance therefore we see no reason to alter the thrust of the MOD's paper although we would wish to see some amendments made to reflect:
 - a. the decision to run-on both the LPDs and LSLs; and,
 - b. the value of deploying or making known our intention to deploy a SSN to the South Atlantic, in any of the 'possible responses' listed in the paper.

Proposed amendments to this effect are attached.

4. The decision to run-on the LPDs does of course restore to the RN the flexibility to respond in varying degrees to each of the military options open to the Argentinians. Our reaction, in terms of the deployment of naval forces need not therefore, depending on the scenario at the time, be necessarily restricted to those indicated in the paper. For this reason, and also those given in Sec/CNS' minute of 15 September last, we remain of the view that the paper should continue to exclude identity of specific costs. It will however, we agree, be desirable that SoFS be provided with an illustration of the likely order of costs for various options for use, as appropriate, in discussion with his OD colleagues.

5. Finally, your minute points to a need to consider (and perhaps plan for) the prospect of a peacetime deployment to the South Atlantic (including the Falkland Islands), and also seeks advice on the minimum time it would take to deploy a frigate to the Islands. You will already be aware that we are considering whether our commitments will allow a small Naval deployment to the South Atlantic in Autumn 1983.

Admittedly this would leave a period of some 18 months without a naval presence in the region, but our firm commitment to the major Task Group deployment to the Indian Ocean this Autumn, means that an earlier mini-deployment to the South Atlantic could only be considered if other priority tasks were sacrificed. Assuming an emergency, it would take a minimum of 19 days to deploy two warships with afloat support from the UK to Port Stanley. This could, of course, be reduced to 16½ days if we had ships standing-by at Gibraltar.

18 Mar 82

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PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO MOD POSITION PAPER ON DEFENCE OF THE
FALKLAND ISLANDS

1. Para 7, 2nd sentence: amend to read:

"Unless RN forces were already deployed to the South Atlantic or Caribbean as part of a normal peacetime deployment, reinforcement would probably have to come from the UK." ✓

- 3rd sentence: amend to read:

"With passage time in the order of 20 days for surface ships and a minimum of 13 days for a nuclear-powered submarine (SSN) and, depending on" ✓

- addition to paragraph 7:

"It could be possible, at the outset of a period of rising tension with the prospect of Argentine military action against the Falkland Islands, to deploy a SSN to the region. This would be expensive but could be covert and so provide us with advance warning of Argentine military deployments. If overt it could serve as a useful deterrent pending the arrival of naval reinforcements. Unless called on to defend itself or British merchant shipping under attack there is little a SSN could do to actually pre-empt such attacks. Conversely, our ability to deter military action and gain time could be improved were we to say that a SSN had been deployed; the Argentines would of course not know whether this were true or not and may accordingly not be prepared to take risks."/>

2. Para 8 - delete last paragraph "After the withdrawal not have sufficient resources". ✓

8(e) - insert after "- Hermes with " - " an LPD and LSLs" ✓