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ILLEGAL LANDING ON SOUTH GEORGIA

1. The Secretary of State asked yesterday to be provided with a short note during the course of this morning setting out possible Naval options for reinforcement together with an assessment of the scope for conducting naval exercises in the South Atlantic.
2. With DNOT's help, I have produced the attached draft. We are to discuss it at ~~0045~~ in my room. If copy addressees have any comments I should be grateful to have them as soon as possible.

29 March 1982

M. H. Nicholls
N H NICHOLLS
Head of DS 5

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D/DS5/3/5/71

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ILLEGAL LANDING ON SOUTH GEORGIA

1. I understand that the Secretary of State has asked for a note setting out the possible options for Naval reinforcement of the Falklands and also assessing the scope for conducting Naval exercises in the South Atlantic.
2. I attach a note by the Naval Staff which indicates and ^{highly} assesses a number of ~~Naval~~ options, in ascending order of magnitude. *Some for the first time, the detailed implications have been examined by COMUSCANT.*
3. Any or all of the ships referred to ~~over~~ ^{over} ~~Loth~~ could be diverted to exercise in the South Atlantic, albeit at penalty ^{to} ~~for~~ their normal programme: thus, option 2 would have implications for the conduct of the Gulf patrol and option 4 would mean the RN having to pull out of the major NATO exercise ~~SPRING~~ ^{MAN} ~~TRAIN~~ in the Mediterranean.
4. Any exercises would, of course, have to be purely national. In present circumstances, no South American Navy would be prepared to participate and it is probable that the USN would

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keep at arms length. South Africa is disqualified for obvious reasons. The South Atlantic is an unusual place for the RN to exercise. There is no especial characteristic which puts it at an advantage above the waters nearer home. Although, therefore, there might be some prima facie presentational advantage in deploying ships for a declared purpose, unconnected with the events in South Georgia, the true purpose would not be difficult to divine. To this extent, such a deployment might be seen to be just as escalatory by the Argentinians as sending ships overtly to reinforce the Falklands.

5. S of S ^{would} have seen from the recent military assessment of the implications of reinforcing the Falklands the very real practical problems involved, not least because ~~the~~ Argentina is capable of summoning up forces to the scene at very short notice as opposed to the fortnight or so that it would take British Naval reinforcements to arrive. Short of the deployment of a major RN Task Force, the Argentine are always well placed to outnumber any RN ships that might be sent to the scene as soon as they reach the area. All of this reinforces the need for caution.

14-05-70 DSV

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NAVAL REINFORCEMENTS OF THE FALKLAND ISLANDS AND SOUTH GEORGIA

1. Possible options for RN reinforcement in the South Atlantic are set out below in ascending order of magnitude. It would take about 16 days for ships to reach the Falklands from Gibraltar and about 20 days from the UK; in both cases a certain amount of warning time would be needed.

1. RFA FORT AUSTIN. FORT AUSTIN is due to sail from Gibraltar on 29 March to resupply HMS ENDURANCE. She will be available to support any ships that might be subsequently deployed to the area. She would also be able to return the out-going Royal Marines garrison, which would otherwise have been taken off by HMS ENDURANCE.

FORT AUSTIN would be capable of embarking a Company Group ~~of~~ Royal Marines (150) at Ascension Island en route should such reinforcement be required. She does not ^{however,} carry helicopters for disembarking troops; and in any case it is doubtful whether Royal Marines reinforcement would ^{be} appropriate without the simultaneous deployment of additional warships.

The Naval Staff are still investigating options for providing tanker support to FORT AUSTIN, given that she is unlikely to be able to put into South American ports. The most likely solution would be to send the RFA PEARLEAF, which is due to arrive at Gibraltar on 1 April.

2. Two Frigates plus Tanker. HMS Ships BROADSWORD and YARMOUTH, together with the RFA PLUMLEAF, are currently at Gibraltar, en route to the Indian Ocean. They do not sail until 5 April, and would be available for deployment South until that date.

3. SSN. An SSN could be made available but, with the ~~smr~~ demand ~~for~~ SSN time, there would be both short and long term penalties.

A SSN could, of course, be deployed covertly if necessary.
[The precise role that she might play is still being examined.]

4. A larger force of DD/FF. Up to 9 DD/FF plus afloat support could be diverted from Gibraltar from the major NATO exercise SPRING TRAIN in the Mediterranean. The ships are currently planned to commence passage back to the UK on 13/April. Minimal notice would be required.

5. Royal Marines Company Group in HMS INVINCIBLE or HMS FEARLESS. A Company Group could easily be transported in either ship, which would require an escort of 4 DD/FF and tanker support. This option is not favoured by the Naval Staff since it would not make the best use of these big ships. A Royal Marines reinforcement on this scale could be effected more simply and in a less escalatory fashion by means of FORT AUSTIN. A minimum of 7 days notice would be required.

6. Commando Group (800). A Commando Group could be conveyed either in HMS HERMES or in HMS ~~HERMES~~ ^{INVINCIBLE} plus HMS FEARLESS. An escort of 4 DD/FF and tanker support would be required. HMS HERMES would provide greater flexibility. Minimum notice would be 7 days.