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to you requested.  
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D Ops Staff 7/10/2

Secretary of State

AIR REINFORCEMENT OF THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

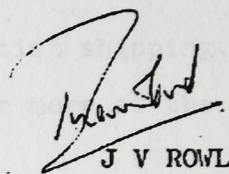
1. You asked for an assessment of our capability to reinforce the Falkland Islands by air. This note has been prepared by the D Ops Staff in consultation with the AFD. The assumption in what follows is that a situation has occurred in which Naval forces cannot reach the area in time and urgent action is necessary (involving pulling out all the stops; maximum possible airlift, use of readily available troops, money no object) by the Services to counter an Argentine incursion.
2. You are aware that the military presence on the Islands and Dependencies at the moment is provided by the Royal Marines. 70 are currently in Port Stanley and a further 20 embarked on HMS ENDURANCE. In addition there is the Falkland Island Defence Force (local TA, enthusiastic, politically reliable and suitable for limited local operations) with a maximum strength of about 40.
3. To reinforce Port Stanley quickly by air would present formidable problems. The main ones are distance, aircraft capacity and endurance, and a lack of suitable destination or diversion airfields. Apart from the South American airfields which, it has to be assumed, would be denied to us, the nearest airfield is at Ascension Island nearly 3,500 miles away. The only aircraft which could cover this distance and operate from the 4,100 ft Port Stanley runway is the HERCULES. Carrying maximum fuel and with its payload reduced to no more than 30 lightly equipped men the aircraft could cover the distance given

favourable winds. This is on the assumption that the aircraft could definitely land at Stanley. The main difficulties here are the unpredictable weather (for which the Falkland Islands are noted), particularly adverse winds, and the risk that successive landings, even with reduced loads, would damage the airfield surface. If for any reason landing could not be guaranteed the air option becomes impracticable as the HERCULES cannot complete the round trip without refuelling. This also rules out the parachute option.

4. Refuelling would, in any case, present problems as only a small amount of fuel (currently sufficient for one HERCULES) is kept at Port Stanley. The fuel, the quality of which is suspect due to probable water contamination, is kept in 45 gallon drums a mile away across the harbour. It would have to be transported by boat and truck, making the process of refuelling a lengthy business (a matter of days rather than hours).

5. An examination of the airfield photograph shows that up to three HERCULES could be accommodated on the parking area. Having delivered their loads they would have to remain at Stanley until they were refuelled. Notwithstanding the time that would elapse before they were refuelled (a matter of weeks) there would be a risk that the parking area would collapse under their weight.

6. The military assessment is that, given the most advantageous conditions, the maximum number of troops which we could deliver to Port Stanley is about 90, with no logistic support. This would not be sufficient to have a good chance of countering anything other than a token Argentinian force of about rifle company strength (120 men). The military view is that reinforcement of the Islands by air is not a practicable proposition, irrespective of the threat at the time.



J V ROWLAND  
Major RM  
for Assistant Chief of the  
Defence Staff Operations

20 March 1982

Attachment:

- 1. Air Photograph of Port Stanley Airfield.

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