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PRIME MINISTER

OFFICIAL DESPATCH ON THE FALKLANDS OPERATION

I attach a minute by Mr. Nott covering a despatch by Admiral Fieldhouse on the Falklands operation. I have held up this minute until now for reasons set out below.

Mr. Nott proposes that the despatch should be published at the same time as the Falklands White Paper. OD will be considering the latter on 7 December.

The despatch was circulated to all members of OD but I have written to all their Private Offices asking that it be circulated no further.

I am told that such a despatch is traditional after a military campaign - and also that we have to be a little careful in suggesting amendments to Sir John Fieldhouse whose right it is to compile such a despatch.

Nevertheless, the media are bound to analyse it in detail and try to detect inconsistencies between it and Ministerial statements. The proceedings of the Franks Committee are also relevant.

I therefore drew attention to certain passages which could cause embarrassment and asked the Cabinet Office to go through the whole document carefully. As a result certain amendments are now being put to Admiral Fieldhouse. The attached despatch is in the form in which it will appear unless Admiral Fieldhouse objects to any of the amendments or unless you wish to propose further ones.

I have highlighted the passages at which I think you will wish to look. In the amended form, I think the only passages which are potentially controversial are:

/ a) Page one.

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a) Page one. Admiral Fieldhouse suggests that by 29 March the situation had worsened to an extent where it was considered sufficiently serious for him to return from Gibraltar to Northwood. He also states that before leaving Gibraltar he ordered preparation of a suitable group of ships to be ready to proceed to the South Atlantic when instructed. Tam Dalyell and others will attempt to show that this must mean that you had knowledge of an invasion before 31 March. The reply would of course be that we had no knowledge of an invasion until 31 March but the situation in South Georgia had clearly deteriorated and normal contingency plans were being made by the military.

b) Page seven and elsewhere. There are various references to the SAS and SBS. The normal convention is that the presence of the SAS and SBS on operations or exercises in peacetime is not acknowledged publicly. But the operations described in the despatch are the normal wartime tasks of reconnaissance and raiding which constitute the overt military role of the SAS and SBS. All concerned therefore think that these references should remain.

Are you content that the despatch should be published at the same time as the Falklands White Paper?

A.J.C.

Yes

29 November 1982

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