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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

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National Intelligence Council

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

VIA : Chairman, National Intelligence Council

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FROM :
National Intelligence Officer for
General Purpose Forces

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SUBJECT : What's Next in the Falklands? --
(Part II) The Defensive Perspective

1. The search for a political solution grinds on; meanwhile preparations for a military test proceed apace on the islands and at sea. This memorandum attempts to look over the shoulders of the Argentine planners and to assess the developing situation through their eyes.

2. The Falklands operation has all the earmarks of a high stakes - high risk gamble on the part of the Argentine leadership for the glory of the Fatherland (and, perhaps, of the Junta, as well). There is good reason to believe that the undertaking has been some time in the making, and does not merely represent a sudden flash of brilliance by General Galtieri or members of his staff. The principal evidence of this:

-- The operation was well executed with only light losses, even though the plan was apparently closely held, with a number of senior officers excluded from the planning process.

-- It has been launched at the turn of the season, just before the onset of bad weather when the (predictably delayed) reaction by the British will be at a disadvantage as they attempt to muster an invasion fleet in the South Atlantic.

3. We should assume that the Argentinians have thought through most of the critical strategic and tactical aspects of the effort--perhaps wargaming the operation in recent months. With this behind them, they may now have a somewhat clearer picture of the politico-military balance, as it is likely to mature, than do their adversaries. While their view may be

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influenced to some extent by the emotional tug of heady enterprise, they have had ample time to contemplate the possible consequences of their initiative and to devise means for coping with various levels of British reaction.

4. From a strategic standpoint the British have the very evident advantage of long range force projection capabilities with their fleet, and perhaps with their Vulcan bombers as well.

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[REDACTED] Nevertheless, the Argentines can probably bank on having most military action confined to the Falkland Islands area, if it takes place at all. While they cannot be completely sure that the British will grant sanctuary to their bases on the mainland, they probably assess that political and moral pressures will weigh heavily upon the British to stick to their announced 200 mile exclusion zone, at least until the battle is joined in earnest. Even then, the British would probably need severe provocation to justify widening the war. This is a considerable advantage to the Argentines, as they can probably count on being able to assemble most of the air and naval striking forces they may require in the vicinity of the potential combat zone without undue risk of loss to preemptive attack. Coupled with this, the great disparity of the distances with which the two sides must contend for keeping their forces supplied may lead the Argentines to believe that the strategic balance lies at least marginally in their favor.

5. Considering the British strengths on the open ocean the Argentinians have probably forgone any serious consideration of engaging the assault fleet at sea and have concentrated their planning efforts on the defense of the Falklands. This may include some attempts at countering the fleet with strikes by aircraft based at Port Stanley.* In this regard, they can count a number of favorable factors influencing the tactical situation. These include:

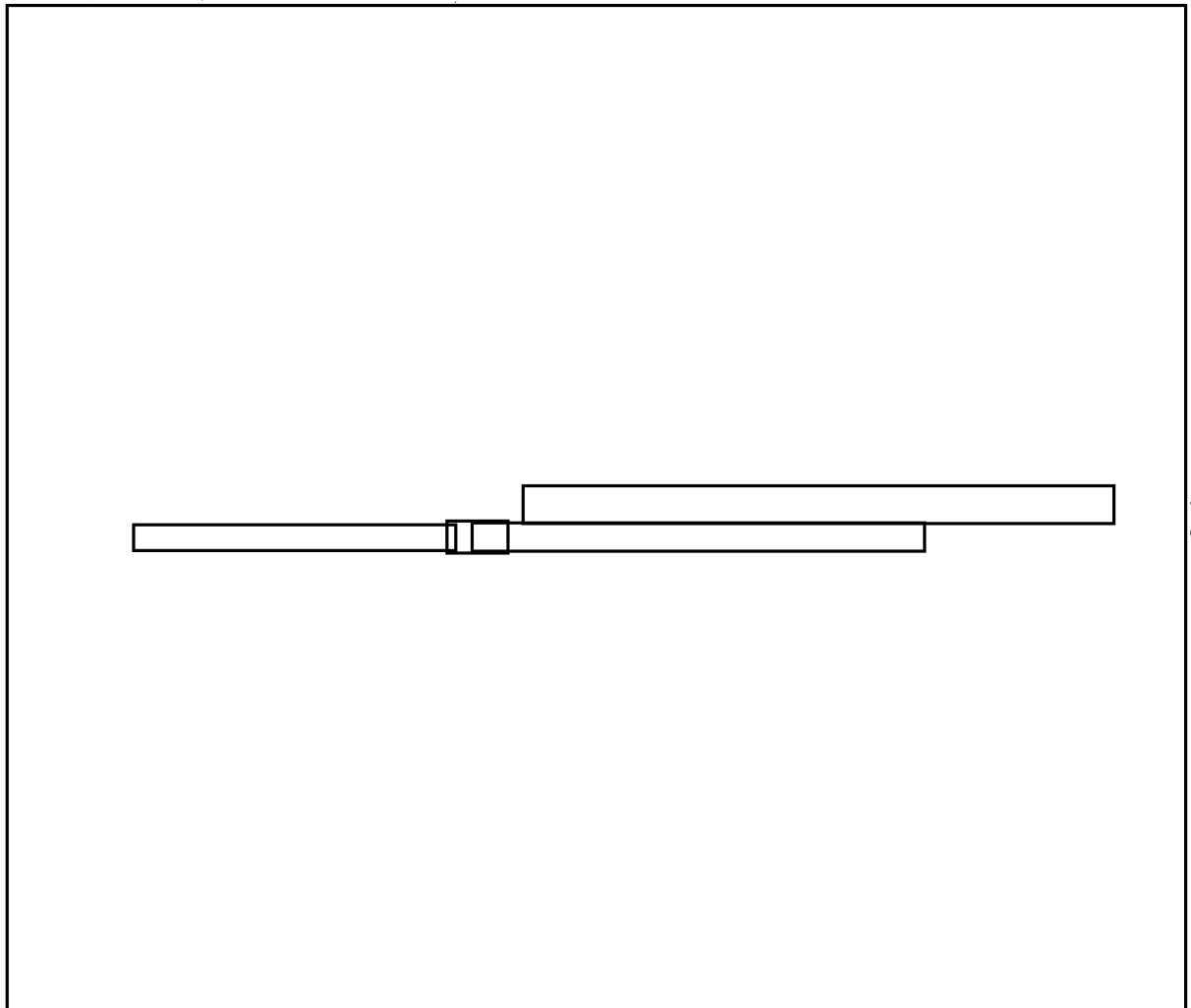
- The likelihood of bad weather restricting the operation of helicopters and small landing craft (gale force winds occur in the Falklands on an average of five times per month in May)
- The existence of many coves and inlets around the islands from which submarines and missile firing surface craft can lie in ambush for a British assault force.

*There is considerable difference of opinion among experts regarding the capacity of the 4,000 ft. Port Stanley airstrip for basing attack or air defense aircraft. Some say it will accommodate all types of Argentine high performance aircraft with full bomb loads. Others dispute this.

- The swampy nature of much of the insular terrain behind the beaches, inhibiting rapid movement inland.
- The readily defensible heights on the islands and the visibility which they afford of the treeless low lands.
- The extension of the 200 meter continental shelf line east of the Falkland Islands, simplifying ASW operations between the islands and the mainland.
- The potential hostage population in and around Port Stanley.

6. With these factors in mind, Argentinian planners are likely to have arranged for certain high priority measures to be accomplished during the weeks preceding the earliest date of possible British reaction:

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7. The Argentines probably assess that they have two fundamental tactical options. One is the staging of a conventional defense, the other a resort to actions intended to achieve small but spectacular victories, in which the outcomes have especially high political value. While not mutually exclusive, the options seek different objectives and imply some differences in force structure on the islands. Moreover, while the former is essentially reactive, the latter is based upon the initiative, is offensive in spirit and incurs somewhat greater risk. The choice between the two would depend primarily on the Argentine estimate of the costs involved and of the relative pay-offs in terms of political or military advantage.

8. The conventional option would be based upon those tactical and strategic advantages which the Argentines enjoy, and an assumption that if they can hang on long enough, and inflict enough casualties upon their opponents, the British will give up and sail home. Recognizing that pressures for withdrawal would be likely to build upon the British Government, both internally and from abroad, if the assault operations were not soon successful, the option has attractive aspects. Its principal drawback is its requirement for establishment of a large garrison on the islands, together with extensive prestockage of supplies for a prolonged conflict. Such measures may not be supportable by the Argentine logistical system.

9. On the other hand, the Argentines may judge that their interests would be better served by a short military engagement in which they might attain international recognition for skill and boldness, whatever the outcome. They have undoubtedly examined the potential British strike force and assessed its vulnerabilities. As the underdog in the scrap, they may judge their ability to defeat the force as less important than their ability to inflict locally decisive and spectacular blows upon one or more of its elements. The Argentines are probably well acquainted with General Giap's counsel: "it is never as effective to scar an opponent's hand as it is to amputate one joint of his finger." Should the Argentines subscribe to this dictum, their tactical problem would become one of seeking vulnerable chinks in the British force and of striking with great vigor at those points. While they may calculate that the price for even one such victory could be high, they might estimate it to be less than they might otherwise sustain in a prolonged battle of attrition. Some possible "finger joints" toward which they might concentrate their efforts are:

*Food and water for the garrison could be a problem in an extended deployment. The local joke is that the troops will accustom themselves to eating Falkland sandwiches, a slice of hot mutton between two slices of cold mutton.

- A British carrier as it approaches the Falklands with numbers of its aircraft configured for ground attack rather than for air defense. This type of target might be struck by a massed effort by attack aircraft, perhaps with some type of air-to-surface missile not yet known to be in Argentinian hands.
- An initial wave of British marines or parachutists as they approach the shore or attempt to land behind the beaches. Concealed shore ATGM and small missile firing surface craft may be effective in this regard. The key to success would lie in surprise. The Argentines are aware that the British have a limited number of guns on their ships suitable for shore bombardment and may calculate that many small two- and three-man missile crews on the shore could disrupt a landing attempt. Similarly, small SAM teams cleverly placed on the islands may inflict heavy losses on a heliborne assault force before it is landed.
- One or more British support ships left behind during the assault, perhaps at anchorage in the vicinity of South Georgia. The Argentines have four submarines which might attack as a pack for maximum effect. Two of the subs are very quiet and may approach their quarry with stealth.

10. Finally, the Argentines must assess their own vulnerabilities and seek to minimize British action in these areas. Most prominent is the tenuousness of the Argentinian air and surface supply line to the mainland. British [REDACTED] submarines and carrier based aircraft can pose serious challenges to the viability of the Argentinian position on the Falklands. The Argentines must consider that their surface transports may be torpedoed, their landing strips cratered and their air transports shot down enroute. A significant proportion of their effort must be devoted to countering the British interdiction.

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11. The Argentines are not strong in ASW and have had little experience in hunting modern SSN. However, with a maximum effort of land-based air, surface ships and submarines, they might be able to catch a British submarine in the shallow waters west of the islands. Such an accomplishment would have high value in terms of the second tactical option. Failing this, they would probably be obliged to resort to small coastal craft for ferrying heavy tonnage supplies, at least partly in expectation of exhausting the British supply of torpedoes.

12. The Argentines probably assess that British air interdiction would be difficult to sustain from carriers. The carriers themselves would be tempting targets of Argentinian missile-equipped aircraft. However, once the British achieve a lodgment ashore and can base Harrier operations on hasty strips in secure land areas, the Argentinians have a more complex problem. They will then have to devote considerable effort to destroying the Harriers in the air or on the ground at dispersed landing sites.

13. This glimpse of the dimensions which an armed conflict could attain gives us reason to hope more strongly than ever that a political solution may be found before a clash occurs. If it does come about, the costs to both sides could be heavy. The demonstrated Argentine propensity to gamble makes the course of the action highly unpredictable. The possibility of their selection of high visibility - high risk political-military tactics should make the British extremely cautious in their exposure of significant assets to the possibility of massed "suicide" attacks. The Argentinians may have already assessed their military capabilities as so modest that they cannot sustain the full weight of a British assault. In that case the British would do well to "expect the unexpected."

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