

Gibraltar

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CONFIDENTIAL

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH



5 April 1982

Prime Minister

A rather more reassuring picture.

A.S.C. 5/4

Dear John

Gibraltar

I understand that the Prime Minister has expressed concern about the implications of the Falkland Islands crisis for Gibraltar, particularly in the light of reports of the jubilant reaction in the Spanish press.

I enclose a note on the subject, prepared by officials in consultation with the Ministry of Defence, which you may like to bring to the Prime Minister's attention. Mr Hurd has seen it and agrees. I am sending a copy of this letter, with enclosure, to David Omand (Ministry of Defence) and to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever

*J E Holmes*

(J E Holmes)  
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq  
10 Downing Street

An urgent assessment of our ability to defend Gibraltar has been commissioned.

AR 5/4.

t-a.

This is suspiciously like the Falkland Islands assessment - 1000 soldiers before invasion. air-cover. etc. mt

with a land boundary, no





## GIBRALTAR: IS THERE A SPANISH MILITARY THREAT?

### Summary and Conclusion

1. Despite the reported jubilant press reaction in Spain to the Argentines capture of the Falkland Islands, we have no reason to believe that there is an increased military threat to Gibraltar from the Spanish Government. We cannot however wholly rule out minor acts of provocation by individual or small groups in the armed forces. There is also a possibility of more aggressive patrolling by the Spanish navy in Gibraltar Waters. There is a small but effective British military presence on the Rock.

### Background and Argument

2. The Spaniards, like the Argentinians, claim Gibraltar on the basis of re-assertion of their territories integrity. They reject the British view that the wishes of the Gibraltarians must be paramount. Spanish press reaction to the Argentinian capture of the Falklands was jubilant: headlines drew the parallel by saying: "Argentina recovers its Gibraltar".

3. But the Spanish Government reaction has been much more cautious. An official statement claimed that the cause of the tension lay in continuation of a dispute about territorial integrity without prospect of effective solution; but it went on to state Spain's opposition to the resolution of such disputes by force. Although Spain abstained in the Security Council debate on the Falklands, the Foreign Minister sent a personal message of good wishes to Lord Carrington saying that the Spanish Government stood ready to do anything considered helpful within the limited range of the possibilities open to them.

4. There are a number of powerful political constraints against the Spaniards taking military action against Gibraltar. They have applied to join NATO and expect application to be ratified before the June NATO summit. They are negotiating to join the EC. They will know that

/military



military action against Gibraltar would lead to both applications being blocked. Furthermore, following the Lisbon Statement of 1980, as reconfirmed by the two Prime Ministers on 8 January, they are about to start negotiations with us on 20-21 April, aimed at resolving all differences over Gibraltar (ie not excluding discussion of sovereignty although they are fully aware of our commitment to the wishes of the Gibraltar people). Simultaneously the border, which has been closed since 1969, will be re-opened. Any attempt at military action would totally negate these negotiations.

5. Although there are strong reasons to believe the Spanish Government will not attempt, in the near future, to take military action against Gibraltar, we cannot be so certain that there will be no isolated acts of provocation by individuals or even small groups within the military. The armed forces contain some extremist right wing elements, who are opposed to their Government's policy of re-opening the border and negotiating with Britain. We cannot wholly rule out the possibility of attempts by ill-disciplined individuals or small groups to demonstrate patriotism by some provocation; but we believe that any such incidents would be minor in scale. Nor can we rule out the possibility of an increase in ostentatious naval patrolling near Gibraltar including minor incursions into territorial waters; but we would expect this to be a result of local initiative not central command.

#### Military

6. Plans exist in Gibraltar to repel a military assault from Spain. The territory is joined to the mainland by a narrow isthmus and would thus be relatively easy to defend against a land assault. Forces at present in Gibraltar consist of:

#### Army

- 1st Battalion Staffordshire Regt (about 600 men) with small arms;
- The Gibraltar Regt (TA) (about 400 men) with small arms and 1 battery of 105 mm pack howitzers;

/Navy



Navy

HMS Broadsword) )  
 HMS Yarmouth ) frigates ) due to sail on 5 April to  
 ) join Operation ARMILLA  
 RFA Plumleaf tanker ) )  
 HMS Oracle (diesel powered submarine)  
 RFA Gold Rover (tanker - in self maintenance)  
 /HMS Galatea (frigate - in refit/

RAF

None

7. Plans exist for the emergency reinforcement of Gibraltar by a Commando Group or by two infantry battalions. The first of these options cannot at present be used because the Commando Group is embarked for the Falklands operation: but the infantry battalions could deploy to Gibraltar, on 7 days notice, if required. Transport could be by air or sea: but in either case access would be difficult after commencement of hostilities.

8. Given the small size of the territory, and its defensibility against attack not only from the land, but from the sea, the British forces in place are in a good position to make an armed assault a militarily hazardous undertaking. Although the territory could no doubt eventually be overwhelmed by vastly superior forces, the defender could put up effective resistance. The main burden of defence would fall on the land forces. Although the presence of HM ships would be a valuable asset in deterring a seaborne assault their presence is not essential for deterrence. An airborne assault would be hazardous and of little apparent military value. The likelihood of civilian resistance and casualties would also give an aggressor pause.



5 APR 1962

