

354. Memorandum From the Secretary of the Navy (Lehman) to Secretary of Defense Weinberger¹

Washington, June 18, 1982

SUBJ

Falklands' Lessons Learned—INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

The fighting in the South Atlantic provides another opportunity to capitalize on the combatants' experiences by reviewing our present and future capabilities in the context of the different successes and failures during the conflict. The geography is similar to the Northern Flanks of NATO and the North Pacific.

There are inherent dangers in making hasty judgments before all relevant *facts* are sorted out from the value judgments. While much of the Falklands interaction had more in common with World War II (we lost four destroyers per day at Okinawa to cruise missiles (kamikazes) than with star wars, there is much to learn from the real-world interaction of new electronic technologies and materials in combat for the first time.

Since the engagement was essentially maritime, I have assembled a team of the best Navy and Marine warfare specialists, military and civilian, from the relevant commands, labs, and bureaus to exploit completely the lessons learned as fast as the data permits.

Arrangements have been made with the Royal Navy, using well established channels for a rapid and complete flow of data. This comprehensive study of the naval and amphibious operations will be fully

¹ Source: Washington National Records Center, OSD Files, FRC 330-84-0003, Argentina (June-Sept) 1982. Secret. Copies were sent to Carlucci and Iklé. A stamped notation at the top of the memorandum indicates that Weinberger saw it on June 21.

coordinated with the Defense-wide effort to address other aspects of the engagement and the engagements in the Middle East.

Our effort will be accomplished in two phases. The first step is well in progress and designed as a quick-look review identifying areas for thorough study such as aluminum superstructure in naval ships and identifying current or FYDP-projected USN/USMC hardware capabilities which would have provided our forces significant advantage or resulted in combat deficiencies if we engaged in a scenario similar to the Falklands. The initial effort will be complete in early July, and I will be prepared to brief you as soon thereafter as your schedule permits. In this briefing, I will also discuss from the Navy vantage point the effectiveness of U.S. direct support/intelligence products provided to the U.K. during the conflict. In our review, we will be looking not only at how the U.S. Navy would conduct offensive and defensive operations in a Falklands-type of scenario, but also operations at a relative level of effort equivalent to that put forth by the Royal Navy (e.g. significant percentage of forces committed). We also intend to take a close look at the U.K. naval command and control structure and at the maritime Rules of Engagement, both of which were apparently very effective. The initial stages of Phase One of our review have highlighted some significant lessons, set forth below, which I believe are of immediate interest.

Background

The following lessons learned, which generally may be characterized as "already known but reinforced," have been identified in the initial review of British and Argentine experiences in the Falkland Islands crisis.

General

The historical effectiveness of the Navy/Marine Corps team as a primary instrument for enforcing foreign policy was reaffirmed, as was the absolute necessity for the "Defense in Depth" provided by the U.S. Navy carrier battle group concept which provides the flexibility and self-protection required to support combat operations.

The United Kingdom's inability to deter the Argentines from aggression dramatically illustrates the importance of maintaining a proper balance between strategic and conventional forces. Britain's emphasis of strategic capability at the expense of conventional naval forces most certainly had a profound impact on the original decision by Argentina to invade the Falklands.

Fleet Operations

From data available thus far, the concept of defense-in-depth as employed by U.S. Navy CV Battle Groups would have provided a

layered force defense with reduced penetrability and fewer leakers/hits. Without this redundant and multi-mission capability, the Royal Navy had insufficient early-warning, distant intercept, and local air superiority. Thus, the burden of defense against the essentially airborne threat fell almost entirely on the inner-most point defenses. The countermeasures the Royal Navy had available proved inadequate to the task in several cases.

Assuming that some antiship missile leakage will always occur against the best of defenses, the low-altitude, antiship missile successes (EXOCET) demonstrated the need to continue development and adequate testing of improved fuzing, EW capability and decoys as part of our defense. It may suggest also that the DRB should consider speeding up deployment of such effective defenses as we do have such as Phalanx. Efforts in this regard should not be focused solely on the Soviet family of missiles.

“Stores-in-depth” became an issue for both protagonists even though the conflict was relatively short-lived and episodic in nature. For example, the supply of air-launched EXOCET and SIDEWINDER was inadequate to meet requirements.

Iron bombs, bullets, and sophisticated weapons all played a large role in the conflict. Naval gunfire support was used extensively and effectively in both the pre- and post-landing phases of the amphibious operation.

Rapid mobilization of commercial shipping and industrial support appears to have been critical to British success. According to the First Sea Lord, 50 commercial ships were modified to support these operations. In his words, these modifications were “expensive, ingenious, and effective.” U.S. surge capability in this regard should be carefully developed and exercised.

Survivability is and will remain an issue in any war at sea. Based on the Royal Navy experience, issues to be studied in depth include the adequacy of armor, compartmentation, seaworthiness, watertight integrity, electrical power distribution and redundancy, and permanent and portable damage control capability.

It appears wider availability of secure communications would have aided both sides in executing various engagements and in maintaining security of operations overall.

The capability of nuclear-powered submarines to transit long distances at high speed and to conduct naval operations including blockage with minimal support provided a significant tactical advantage and was apparently successful at intimidating Argentine surface forces. The very good modern Argentine diesel-electric submarines apparently were ineffective.

Amphibious Operations

The Falkland Islands campaign provided a classic example of the value of maritime force projection through amphibious operations.

The objective area was isolated; time was allotted to plan, prepare, and rehearse the assault. Advance Force Operations included the use of unconventional forces which provided the commander with extensive tactical intelligence.

The Advance Force operations were conducted by means of shore bombardment with naval guns and aircraft to reduce enemy defenses and to deceive the Argentines.

The San Carlos Bay landing was conducted under adverse conditions by a combined arms action designed for the single purpose of projecting power ashore. By landing where the “enemy was not” a beachhead was established as the base for future offensive operations.

Of particular interest during the transition ashore is the role of the Harrier aircraft. This crisis should provide significant information on the Harrier in the air-to-air role, as well as its ability to operate without the advantage of an airfield.

The Royal Marines and paratroopers revalidated the striking power and mobility of light infantry supported by light armor. Under the cover of naval gunfire and mobile field artillery, key objectives were seized—many at night.

The ability to move from one side of the island to the other has once again highlighted the versatility of the helicopter.

Casualties on both sides supported the need for hospital ships and deployable medical facilities.

So far, evidence indicates U.S.-designed equipment and weapons worked as advertised with a higher success rate than we would have predicted.

John Lehman