

FALKLAND/MALVINAS ISLANDS - SOUTH ATLANTIC WAR -  
SINKING OF THE BELGRANO

LETTER AND ANNEX FROM THE BRITISH PRIME MINISTER  
ON THE SINKING OF THE BELGRANO\*

FOLLOWING IS THE TEXT OF A LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER MRS MARGARET THATCHER, DATED 19 SEPTEMBER TO MR GEORGE FOULKES, MP TOGETHER WITH AN ANNEX:

LETTER:

YOU WROTE TO ME ON 23 AUGUST AND 14 SEPTEMBER ABOUT DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT AT THE TIME OF THE FALKLANDS CONFLICT.

YOUR QUESTIONS REFLECT A NUMBER OF FUNDAMENTAL MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE SITUATION IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC IN APRIL AND MAY 1982. I AM ENCLOSING, AS AN ANNEX TO THIS LETTER, A STATEMENT OF THE POSITION WHICH SHOULD CLEAR UP THESE MISCONCEPTIONS, AND REMOVE ANY DOUBTS IN YOUR MIND ABOUT THE REASONS FOR OUR ACTIONS.

TO PUT THE MATTER BRIEFLY, IN APRIL 1982 ARGENTINA HAD ATTACKED AND INVADDED BRITISH TERRITORY., DESPITE INTENSE AND CONTINUING DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS, ARGENTINA REFUSED TO COMPLY WITH A MANDATORY RESOLUTION OF THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL TO WITHDRAW ITS FORCES., WITH ALL-PARTY SUPPORT, AND IN EXERCISE OF OUR INHERENT RIGHT OF SELF-DEFENCE UNDER ARTICLE 51 OF THE UN CHARTER, THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT DESPATCHED THE TASK FORCE TO THE SOUTH ATLANTIC., BY THE END OF APRIL AS IT APPROACHED THE FALKLAND ISLANDS THE TASK FORCE WAS INCREASINGLY VULNERABLE TO ARGENTINE ATTACK., BY 2 MAY IT HAD ALREADY BEEN ATTACKED BY ARGENTINE AIRCRAFT AND THERE WERE CLEAR AND UNEQUIVOCAL INDICATIONS THAT IT WAS UNDER FURTHER THREAT FROM A STRONG AND CO-ORDINATED Pincer MOVEMENT BY THE MAJOR UNITS OF THE ARGENTINE NAVY, INCLUDING THE CRUISER 'GENERAL BELGRANO' AND THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER '25 DE MAYO'. THE THEN ARGENTINE OPERATIONS COMMANDER, SOUTH ATLANTIC, HAS SINCE CONFIRMED PUBLICLY THAT HIS WARSHIPS HAD INDEED BEEN ORDERED TO ATTACK. NO GOVERNMENT WITH A PROPER SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY COULD HAVE REFRAINED FROM TAKING APPROPRIATE MEASURES TO COUNTER THE THREATS TO THE TASK FORCE, AND TO ENSURE ITS SAFETY TO THE MAXIMUM EXTENT POSSIBLE. RISKS COULD NOT BE TAKEN, ESPECIALLY WHEN HOSTILITIES HAD BEEN SO CLEARLY EMBARKED UPON BY THE ARGENTINES.

YOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ARGENTINE AIRCRAFT CARRIER AND THE EVENTS OF 2 MAY ARE ANSWERED IN THE ANNEX

YOU ALSO ASKED WHETHER A POLARIS SUBMARINE WAS DEPLOYED AS DESCRIBED IN THE NEW STATESMAN ARTICLE ON 23 AUGUST. THERE WAS NO CHANGE IN THE STANDARD DEPLOYMENT PATTERN OF OUR POLARIS SUBMARINES DURING THE CONFLICT. MOREOVER, THE GOVERNMENT GAVE A CATEGORICAL ASSURANCE AT THE TIME THAT NUCLEAR WEAPONS WOULD NOT BE USED IN THE FALKLANDS CONFLICT (SEE THE STATEMENT MADE BY VISCOUNT TRENCHARD IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS ON 27 APRIL 1982 - HANSARD VOL. 429, COL. 778).

\* The text of this letter was made available by Mr. M S. Hone, Second Secretary, British High Commission, Canberra.

I HAVE GIVEN YOU IN THE ANNEX AS FULL AN ACCOUNT OF THESE MATTERS AS, I AM ADVISED, IS CONSISTENT WITH NATIONAL SECURITY. I MUST MAKE IT CLEAR THAT IT WOULD BE, AND WILL REMAIN, QUITE WRONG FOR ME TO DISCLOSE ALL THE MATERIAL THAT WAS AVAILABLE TO MINISTERS AT THE TIME TO DO SO WOULD STILL RISK IRREPARABLE DAMAGE TO NATIONAL SECURITY AND COULD PUT LIVES AT RISK IN THE FUTURE.

THOSE WHO SEEK TO CRITICISE THE GOVERNMENT'S ACTIONS (INCLUDING PEOPLE OUTSIDE THIS COUNTRY WHO HAVE EVERY REASON TO DISCREDIT THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM) ARE NOT SUBJECT TO THE SAME CONSTRAINTS AND HAVE FELT FREE TO MAKE A LARGE NUMBER OF ASSERTIONS. I HAVE ALREADY EXPLAINED WHY I CANNOT MAKE PUBLIC EVERYTHING WHICH WOULD MAKE IT POSSIBLE TO DISCUSS WHETHER THOSE ASSERTIONS ARE TRUE OR FALSE. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, I MUST EMPHASISE THE CENTRAL POINT ON THE BASIS OF ALL THE MATERIAL THAT WAS AVAILABLE TO MINISTERS AT THE TIME, MY COLLEAGUES AND I WERE SATISFIED THAT WE TOOK THE RIGHT DECISIONS IN ORDER TO PROTECT THE LIVES OF OUR FORCES. NOTHING THAT HAS SINCE BEEN PUT FORWARD - AND I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT IT HAS ALL BEEN EXAMINED WITH THE UTMOST CARE - HAS LED ME OR ANY OF MY COLLEAGUES TO HAVE ANY DOUBTS THAT WE WERE RIGHT.

(SGD) MARGARET THATCHER

#### ANNEX.

1. THE THREATS WHICH FACED THE TASK FORCE AT THE END OF APRIL AND THE BEGINNING OF MAY 1982 CAN ONLY BE APPRECIATED IN THE LIGHT OF THE SITUATION IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC AT THAT TIME.
2. ON 2ND APRIL 1982, THE PROCESS OF DIPLOMATIC NEGOTIATIONS OVER THE FALKLAND ISLANDS WAS ABRUPTLY INTERRUPTED BY ARGENTINA'S UNPROVOKED ARMED INVASION OF THE ISLANDS. HAVING OBTAINED CONTROL OF THE ISLANDS, THE ARGENTINES THEN REFUSED TO COMPLY WITH MANDATORY RESOLUTION 502 OF THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL, WHICH DEMANDED AN IMMEDIATE WITHDRAWAL OF THEIR FORCES.
3. IN EXERCISE OF THE INHERENT RIGHT OF SELF-DEFENCE UNDER ARTICLE 51 OF THE UNITED NATIONS CHARTER, AND IN PARALLEL WITH INTENSE BUT ULTIMATELY UNPRODUCTIVE DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY, THE BRITISH TASK FORCE WAS DESPATCHED AT THE BEGINNING OF APRIL, WITH ALL-PARTY SUPPORT, FOLLOWING ARGENTINA'S ACTION, WHICH WAS WHOLLY INCONSISTENT WITH INTERNATIONAL LAW AND THE UN CHARTER. 28,000 BRITISH SERVICEMEN AND CIVILIANS EVENTUALLY SAILED IN THE TASK FORCE., IT WAS THE FOREMOST AND CONTINUING DUTY OF THE GOVERNMENT TO TAKE SUCH DECISIONS AS WERE NECESSARY TO PROTECT THEM AS THE EVENTS OF THE MOMENT DEMANDED.
4. ON 7TH APRIL, THE DEFENCE SECRETARY HAD ANNOUNCED THE ESTABLISHMENT, AS FROM 12TH APRIL, OF A 200 NAUTICAL MILE MARITIME EXCLUSION ZONE AROUND THE FALKLAND ISLANDS., BUT IT WAS MADE CLEAR IN THE ANNOUNCEMENT THAT THIS WAS 'WITHOUT PREJUDICE TO THE RIGHT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO TAKE WHATEVER ADDITIONAL MEASURES MAY BE NEEDED IN EXERCISE OF ITS RIGHT OF SELF-DEFENCE, UNDER ARTICLE 51 OF THE UNITED NATIONS CHARTER,' MR NOTT TOLD THE HOUSE OF COMMONS THAT IF IT BECAME NECESSARY, THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT WOULD USE FORCE TO ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVE OF SECURING ARGENTINE WITHDRAWAL HE ADDED. 'WE HOPE THAT IT WILL NOT COME TO THAT. WE HOPE THAT DIPLOMACY WILL SUCCEED NEVERTHELESS, THE ARGENTINES WERE THE FIRST TO USE FORCE OF ARMS IN ORDER TO ESTABLISH THEIR PRESENT CONTROL OF THE FALKLANDS...'

5. IN LATE APRIL 1982 THE TASK FORCE WAS STRUNG OUT BETWEEN ASCENSION ISLAND AND THE FALKLANDS AND VULNERABLE TO ATTACK. ON 23RD APRIL 1982, THE GOVERNMENT ACCORDINGLY SENT THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE TO THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT, MAKING IT CLEAR THAT THE TERMS OF THE COMMUNICATION CAME INTO EFFECT IMMEDIATELY:

'IN ANNOUNCING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MARITIME EXCLUSION ZONE AROUND THE FALKLAND ISLANDS, HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT MADE IT CLEAR THAT THIS MEASURE WAS WITHOUT PREJUDICE TO THE RIGHT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO TAKE WHATEVER ADDITIONAL MEASURES MAY BE NEEDED IN THE EXERCISE OF ITS RIGHT OF SELF-DEFENCE UNDER ARTICLE 51 OF THE UNITED NATIONS CHARTER. IN THIS CONNECTION, HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT NOW WISHES TO MAKE CLEAR THAT ANY APPROACH ON THE PART OF ARGENTINE WARSHIPS, INCLUDING SUBMARINES, NAVAL AUXILIARIES, OR MILITARY AIRCRAFT WHICH COULD AMOUNT TO A THREAT TO INTERFERE WITH THE MISSION OF BRITISH FORCES IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC WILL ENCOUNTER THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE. ALL ARGENTINE AIRCRAFT INCLUDING CIVIL AIRCRAFT ENGAGING IN SURVEILLANCE OF THESE BRITISH FORCES WILL BE REGARDED AS HOSTILE AND ARE LIABLE TO BE DEALT WITH ACCORDINGLY.'

IT IS CLEAR FROM THE ABOVE TEXT THAT THE WARNING APPLIED OUTSIDE THE EXCLUSION ZONE AS WELL AS WITHIN IT. THIS MESSAGE WAS NOTIFIED TO THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL AND CIRCULATED ACCORDINGLY ON 24TH APRIL. IT WAS ALSO RELEASED PUBLICLY.

6. ON 28TH APRIL 1982 THE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A 200 NAUTICAL MILE TOTAL EXCLUSION ZONE AROUND THE FALKLANDS ISLANDS, EFFECTIVE AS FROM 30TH APRIL, WHICH WOULD APPLY TO ALL ARGENTINE SHIPS AND AIRCRAFT. THE ANNOUNCEMENT AGAIN STRESSED THAT 'THESE MEASURES ARE WITHOUT PREJUDICE TO THE RIGHT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO TAKE WHATEVER ADDITIONAL MEASURES MAY BE NEEDED IN EXERCISE OF ITS RIGHT OF SELF-DEFENCE, UNDER ARTICLE 51 OF THE UN CHARTER'.

7. ON 30TH APRIL, MINISTERS MET TO CONSIDER THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE CAPABILITY OF THE AIRCRAFT CARRIED BY THE ARGENTINE AIRCRAFT CARRIER, THE '25 DE MAYO', TO THREATEN OUR FORCES FROM THE AIR AT SUBSTANTIAL DISTANCES FROM THE ARGENTINE MAINLAND. AFTER THE MOST CAREFUL CONSIDERATION OF THE LEGAL, MILITARY AND POLITICAL ISSUES, MINISTERS DECIDED THAT OUR FORCES SHOULD BE PERMITTED TO ATTACK THE '25 DE MAYO' ON THE HIGH SEAS (THAT IS BOTH WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE TOTAL EXCLUSION ZONE), IN CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH IT POSED A MILITARY THREAT TO THE TASK FORCE. AS SET OUT IN PARAGRAPH 5 ABOVE, A WARNING THAT ARGENTINE WARSHIPS THREATENING THE TASK FORCE WOULD MEET WITH AN APPROPRIATE RESPONSE HAD ALREADY BEEN DELIVERED TO THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT ON 23RD APRIL., AND MINISTERS CONCLUDED THAT NO FURTHER WARNING WAS NEEDED. THERE IS NO TRUTH IN THE SUGGESTION THAT THE FOREIGN SECRETARY AND THE ATTORNEY GENERAL OPPOSED OR DISSENTED FROM THE DECISION OF 30TH APRIL. BUT ON 1ST MAY, THE DAY HE LEFT FOR WASHINGTON, THE FOREIGN SECRETARY RAISED THE NEED FOR A FURTHER WARNING TO THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT. THE MATTER HAD BEEN TAKEN NO FURTHER, HOWEVER, WHEN THE GENERAL SITUATION CHANGED COMPLETELY: FIRST, WITH THE ATTACKS WHICH THE ARGENTINE AIR FORCE LAUNCHED FOR THE FIRST TIME ON THE TASK FORCE ON 1ST MAY AND SECOND, WITH THE CLEAR AND UNEQUIVOCAL INDICATIONS WHICH BECAME AVAILABLE THAT WEEKEND THAT THE ARGENTINE NAVY WAS COMMITTED TO HOSTILE ACTION AGAINST THE TASK FORCE.

8. ON 1ST MAY 1982 THE TASK FORCE CAME UNDER ATTACK FOR THE FIRST TIME FROM THE ARGENTINE AIRFORCE, OPERATING FROM THE MAINLAND AS THE DEFENCE SECRETARY SAID IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ON 4TH MAY. 'ON 1ST MAY THE ARGENTINES LAUNCHED ATTACKS ON OUR SHIPS, DURING MOST OF THE DAYLIGHT HOURS. THE ATTACKS BY ARGENTINE MIRAGE AND CANBERRA AIRCRAFT OPERATING FROM THE MAINLAND WERE REPULSED BY BRITISH SEA HARRIERS. HAD OUR SEA HARRIERS FAILED TO REPULSE THE ATTACKS ON THE TASK FORCE, OUR SHIPS COULD HAVE BEEN SEVERELY DAMAGED OR SUNK IN FACT, ONE ARGENTINE CANBERRA AND ONE MIRAGE WERE SHOT DOWN AND OTHERS WERE DAMAGED. WE BELIEVE THAT ANOTHER MIRAGE WAS BROUGHT DOWN BY ARGENTINE ANTI-AIRCRAFT FIRE. ONE OF OUR FRIGATES SUFFERED SPLINTER DAMAGE AS A RESULT OF THE AIR ATTACKS AND THERE WAS ONE BRITISH CASUALTY WHOSE CONDITION IS NOW SATISFACTORY. ALL OUR AIRCRAFT RETURNED SAFELY. ON THE SAME DAY, OUR FORCES LOCATED AND ATTACKED WHAT WAS BELIEVED TO BE AN ARGENTINE SUBMARINE WHICH WAS CLEARLY IN A POSITION TO TORPEDO OUR SHIPS. IT IS NOT KNOWN WHETHER THE SUBMARINE WAS HIT. THE PROLONGED AIR ATTACK ON OUR SHIPS, THE PRESENCE OF AN ARGENTINE SUBMARINE CLOSE BY, AND ALL OTHER INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO US, LEFT US IN NO DOUBT OF THE DANGERS TO OUR TASK FORCE FROM HOSTILE ACTION'. ALL BRITISH UNITS WERE ON MAXIMUM ALERT TO DEAL WITH ANY NAVAL OR AIR ATTACKS.

9 AS ADMIRAL WOODWARD HAS EXPLAINED 'EARLY ON THE MORNING OF 2ND MAY, ALL THE INDICATIONS WERE THAT THE '25 DE MAYO', THE ARGENTINE CARRIER, AND A GROUP OF ESCORTS HAD SLIPPED PAST MY FORWARD SSN BARRIER TO THE NORTH, WHILE THE CRUISER GENERAL BELGRANO AND HER ESCORTS WERE ATTEMPTING TO COMPLETE THE PINNER MOVEMENT FROM THE SOUTH, STILL OUTSIDE THE TOTAL EXCLUSION ZONE.' THE ARGENTINE OPERATIONS COMMANDER IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC AT THE TIME, ADMIRAL JUAN JOSE LOMBARDO, CONFIRMED WITHOUT HESITATION ON THE BBC PANORAMA PROGRAMME ON 16 APRIL THIS YEAR THAT THE ARGENTINE NAVY, AS WE THOUGHT, WERE ATTEMPTING TO ENGAGE IN A PINNER MOVEMENT AGAINST THE TASK FORCE, USING THE '25 DE MAYO' AND ITS ESCORTS IN THE NORTH AND THE 'GENERAL BELGRANO' AND ITS ESCORTS ATTEMPTING TO COMPLETE THE MOVEMENT FROM THE SOUTH.

10. AS WAS FURTHER EXPLAINED IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S LETTER TO MR. DENZIL DAVIES, HMS CONQUEROR HAD SIGHTED THE BELGRANO FOR THE FIRST TIME ON 1ST MAY. ON 2ND MAY, IN RESPONSE TO THE THREAT TO THE TASK FORCE, ADMIRAL WOODWARD SOUGHT A CHANGE TO THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT TO ENABLE CONQUEROR TO ATTACK THE BELGRANO OUTSIDE THE EXCLUSION ZONE. ON THE BASIS OF THE CLEAR AND UNEQUIVOCAL INDICATIONS AVAILABLE TO THE GOVERNMENT THAT THE ARGENTINE NAVY POSED A REAL AND DIRECT THREAT TO THE TASK FORCE AND THOSE SAILING WITH IT AND ON THE ADVICE OF THEIR MOST SENIOR MILITARY ADVISERS, MINISTERS DECIDED AT 1 PM THAT THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT SHOULD BE CHANGED TO PERMIT ATTACKS ON ALL ARGENTINE NAVAL VESSELS ON THE HIGH SEAS, AS HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN AGREED FOR THE '25 DE MAYO' ALONE (SEE PARAGRAPH 7 ABOVE). THE NECESSARY ORDER CONVEYING THIS CHANGE WAS SENT BY NAVAL HEADQUARTERS AT NORTHWOOD TO HMS CONQUEROR AT 1.30 PM (ALL TIMINGS IN THIS AND THE FOLLOWING PARAGRAPHS ARE GIVEN IN LONDON TIME). SHORTLY AFTER 3 PM, HMS CONQUEROR REPORTED THE POSITION OF THE BELGRANO AT 9 AM AND 3 PM THAT DAY. HMS CONQUEROR HAD NOT THEN RECEIVED THE ORDER CHANGING THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT. THE LIMITATIONS IN COMMUNICATIONS WITH OUR SUBMARINES OPERATING IN THE FAR SOUTH ATLANTIC MEANT THAT SUBMARINE OPERATIONS THERE COULD NOT BE MONITORED AND CONTROLLED HOUR BY HOUR. IT WAS NOT UNTIL AFTER 5 PM THAT HMS CONQUEROR REPORTED THAT SHE HAD RECEIVED AND UNDERSTOOD THE NEW ORDER AND INTENDED TO ATTACK. THE BELGRANO WAS ATTACKED JUST BEFORE 8 PM.

11 CONQUEROR'S REPORT ON THE BELGRANO'S POSITION WAS RECEIVED BY NORTHWOOD AT 3.40 PM AND MADE KNOWN TO SENIOR NAVAL OFFICERS THERE AND AT THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE LATER THAT AFTERNOON. THE REPORT SHOWED THAT THE BELGRANO HAD REVERSED COURSE. BUT SHE COULD HAVE ALTERED COURSE AGAIN AND CLOSED ON ELEMENTS OF THE TASK FORCE, ACTING IN CONCERT WITH THE CARRIER TO THE NORTH. IN THE LIGHT OF THE CONTINUED THREAT POSED BY ARGENTINE NAVAL FORCES AGAINST THE TASK FORCE, THE PRECISE POSITION AND COURSE OF THE BELGRANO AT THAT TIME WERE IRRELEVANT. FOR THIS REASON, THE REPORT WAS NOT MADE KNOWN TO MINISTERS AT THE TIME.

12. NO EVIDENCE HAS AT ANY TIME BECOME AVAILABLE TO THE GOVERNMENT WHICH WOULD MAKE MINISTERS CHANGE THE JUDGEMENT THEY REACHED ON 2ND MAY THAT THE BELGRANO POSED A THREAT TO THE TASK FORCE. IN THE PANORAMA INTERVIEW WHICH IS REFERRED TO EARLIER, ADMIRAL LOMBARDO STATED THAT THE DECISION TO SINK THE ARGENTINE CRUISER HAD BEEN TACTICALLY SOUND, AND ONE WHICH HE TOO WOULD HAVE TAKEN HAD HE BEEN IN BRITAIN'S POSITION. IT IS, OF COURSE, THE CASE THAT AFTER THE SINKING OF THE BELGRANO MAJOR ARGENTINE WARSHIPS REMAINED WITHIN 12 MILES OF THE ARGENTINE COAST AND TOOK NO FURTHER PART IN THE CAMPAIGN.

13. AS TO SUBSEQUENT OPERATIONS BY HMS CONQUEROR, IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE ATTACK UPON THE BELGRANO CONQUEROR HERSELF CAME UNDER ATTACK FROM THE ARGENTINE ESCORTING DESTROYERS AND, TO EVADE THIS, MOVED AWAY FROM THE AREA. AS HER CONTINUING ROLE WAS TO PROTECT THE TASK FORCE FROM THE THREAT POSED BY ARGENTINE WARSHIPS, SHE SUBSEQUENTLY PATROLLED TO THE NORTH AND WEST OF THE AREA WHERE THE BELGRANO HAD BEEN SUNK., WHEN ON 4TH MAY CONQUEROR SIGNALLED THAT SHE WAS RETURNING TO THAT AREA, SHE WAS ORDERED NOT TO ATTACK WARSHIPS ENGAGED IN RESCUING SURVIVORS FROM THE BELGRANO.

14 ATTENTION HAS BEEN FOCUSSED ON INACCURACIES IN THE STATEMENT MADE BY THE THEN DEFENCE SECRETARY, MR. NOTT, IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ON 4TH MAY. IT SHOULD BE BORNE IN MIND THAT THIS STATEMENT HAD TO BE PREPARED IN FAST-MOVING AND SOMETIMES CONFUSED CIRCUMSTANCES WHILE MINISTERS WERE PREOCCUPIED WITH CONTINUING THREATS TO THE TASK FORCE. IT WAS EXPLAINED IN THE LETTER TO MR. DENZIL DAVIES WHY IT WAS THEN POSSIBLE TO CORRECT EARLIER STATEMENTS WHICH WERE MADE IN GOOD FAITH AND TO GIVE FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE CONQUEROR'S OPERATION. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN INAPPROPRIATE TO HAVE GIVEN DETAILS AT THE TIME ABOUT THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH CONQUEROR DETECTED AND TRACKED THE BELGRANO AND OTHER ASPECTS OF THE ENGAGEMENT SINCE THESE COULD WELL HAVE PROVIDED INFORMATION VALUABLE TO THE ARGENTINE NAVY.

15 THE NEED TO DO EVERYTHING WE COULD TO PROTECT THE LIVES OF SOME 10,000 BRITISH PERSONNEL - SERVICE AND CIVILIAN THEN IN THE TASK FORCE AND AT RISK FROM THE ARGENTINE NAVY - WAS THE SOLE REASON FOR THE ATTACK ON THE BELGRANO. NO OTHER CONSIDERATION ENTERED THE CALCULATIONS OF THE MINISTERS CONCERNED, AND IN PARTICULAR THERE WAS NO QUESTION OF TAKING THE ACTION IN ORDER TO UNDERMINE PEACE PROPOSALS PUT FORWARD BY THE PRESIDENT OF PERU, ABOUT WHICH MINISTERS IN LONDON HAD NO KNOWLEDGE AT THE TIME. AS HAS BEEN FREQUENTLY MADE CLEAR THE FIRST INDICATIONS OF THESE PROPOSALS DID NOT REACH LONDON FROM WASHINGTON UNTIL 11.15 PM LONDON TIME ON 2ND MAY - OVER THREE HOURS AFTER THE ATTACK ON THE BELGRANO - AND FROM LIMA UNTIL 2AM LONDON TIME ON 3RD MAY

16. DIPLOMATIC ACTION WAS, HOWEVER, ALSO PURSUED VIGOROUSLY. EVERY EFFORT WAS MADE TO SECURE BY DIPLOMATIC MEANS THE OBJECTIVE OF THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE ARGENTINE FORCES. AS THE PRIME MINISTER SAID IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ON 29TH APRIL 1982, IT WAS THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT'S EARNEST HOPE THAT THIS OBJECTIVE COULD BE ACHIEVED BY A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT. BUT BY 29TH APRIL, THE INITIATIVE OF THE US SECRETARY OF STATE, MR HAIG, HAD FOUNDERED ON ARGENTINE OB DURACY. ON 20TH APRIL, HE ANNOUNCED THAT THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT HAD HAD REASON TO HOPE THAT THE UNITED KINGDOM WOULD CONSIDER A SETTLEMENT ON THE LINES OF THE SECOND SET OF PROPOSALS FORMULATED BY THE US GOVERNMENT., BUT THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT HAD INFORMED THE AMERICANS ON 29TH APRIL THAT THEY COULD NOT ACCEPT IT. AS GENERAL GALTIERI LATER EXPLICITLY ADMITTED IN AN INTERVIEW WITH AN ARGENTINE NEWSPAPER, ARGENTINE DOMESTIC POLITICAL OPINION MADE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE JUNTA TO AGREE TO A SOLUTION THAT WOULD ENTAIL THE WITHDRAWAL OF ARGENTINE FORCES. THE BRITISH AUTHORITIES BY CONTRAST, CONTINUED THE SEARCH FOR A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT UNTIL 17TH MAY

17. THE MEASURES TAKEN IN LATE APRIL AND EARLY MAY 1982 WERE DESIGNED CLEARLY AND EXCLUSIVELY TO SAFEGUARD THE LIVES OF THOSE SERVING WITH OUR FORCES, BY RESPONDING TO THE THREAT POSED TO OUR SHIPS IN ORDER TO ENSURE, IN PARTICULAR, THE SAFETY OF OUR TWO AIRCRAFT CARRIERS ON WHICH THE PROTECTION OF THE TASK FORCE ULTIMATELY DEPENDED. THERE WAS NO QUESTION OF ANY ATTEMPT TO DESTROY THE PROSPECT FOR A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT.

ENDS VS 083/84

## FALKLAND/MALVINAS ISLANDS

UNITED KINGDOM - FIFTH REPORT FROM THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
COMMITTEE, HOUSE OF COMMONS, SESSION 1983/84.

THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

lxi

**MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

179. Our main conclusions and recommendations are as follows:

*United Kingdom and Argentine claims to the Falkland Islands*

- (i) The historical and legal evidence demonstrates such areas of uncertainty that we are unable to reach a categorical conclusion on the legal validity of the historical claims to the Falkland Islands of either Argentina or the United Kingdom (*paragraph 22*).
- (ii) We believe, however, that much of the historical argument—although vital to an understanding of the tenacity with which the rival sovereignty claims are espoused in both Argentina and the United Kingdom—has been rendered less relevant by Argentina's illegal resort to arms in April 1982 (*paragraph 22*).
- (iii) Whatever the strength of Argentina's claims to the Falklands prior to their invasion, we have no doubt that those claims have been seriously weakened by Argentina's resort to arms. Equally, whatever the previous uncertainties about the United Kingdom's legal claims to sovereignty, the invasion and war have greatly reinforced the moral and political force of HM Government's commitment to protect the interests and rights of the population of the Falklands (*paragraph 46*).
- (iv) We have concluded that the claims advanced by Argentina in respect of the Dependencies of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands are without legal foundation (*paragraph 23*).

*HM Government's attitude to negotiations with Argentina*

- (v) HM Government's opposition to any talks with Argentina about the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands and Dependencies, although undoubtedly making progress on other matters more difficult, is no doubt prudent in the present situation, when direct bilateral talks towards the restoration of normal economic and diplomatic relations have not yet been joined, and Argentina has not formally declared an end to the state of hostilities (*paragraph 55*).
- (vi) In the light of the United Kingdom's unavoidable obligations to the Falkland Islanders, the desire merely to "do a deal" with Argentina cannot be regarded as the main inspiration of British policy, however high the cost to the United Kingdom of the present situation (*paragraph 59*).
- (vii) The extent to which the United Kingdom Government should feel encouraged to strike a deal during what amounts to Sr Alfonsín's honeymoon period depends very much on the nature of the deal likely to be struck. If it were to be one dependent on purely Argentine guarantees for the Falkland Islanders, the question inevitably arises as to how far the word of Sr Alfonsín's Government can be regarded as an Argentine bond. Similarly, to strike a deal in the hope that it would reinforce the stability of the democratic regime in Buenos Aires would be an extremely risky gamble, since many issues other than the Falklands could contribute to that regime's collapse (*paragraph 73*).

*Argentine attitudes towards negotiations with the United Kingdom*

- (viii) It is clear that when referring to negotiations on sovereignty, the new Argentine Government is pursuing a policy essentially no different from that of its predecessors: that such negotiations, once begun, must lead eventually and inevitably to the relinquishment of the United Kingdom's claim to, and administration of, the Falklands (*paragraph 69*).

*Prospects for progress towards a settlement*

- (ix) In view of the intensity of feelings in Argentina, Britain and the Falklands about their rival views of the sovereignty issue, the emotions generated by the war, and the extent of the United Kingdom Government's commitments to the present generation of Falkland Islanders, the prospects for an early settlement of the sovereignty dispute itself are remote (*paragraph 85*).
- (x) All our evidence has reinforced the wisdom of the general approach now being adopted by HM Government, that progress should be made towards "re-establishing practical and sensible arrangements for relations between the two countries". If, however, Argentine insistence on the inclusion of the sovereignty issue on the agenda of future talks is maintained, progress on other fronts is likely to be frustrated. Moreover, Argentina will assume that her position, and her hope of recovering the Islands, will be weakened by any arrangements which make life easier for the Islanders and reduce the burden which they impose on British revenues, and it is clearly this factor which induces the Argentine Government to see a link between the issue of sovereignty and relations between the two countries in other fields (*paragraph 86*).
- (xi) There is undoubted need for politicians and the public, particularly in the United Kingdom and the Falklands, to recognise that the present situation, although understandable in the short term, can only offer an uncertain future for the Islands in the long term, and that some kind of accommodation with Argentina is not only inevitable, in view of the cost of the present policy to the United Kingdom, but also desirable if the Falklands are to have any prospect of long-term economic prosperity and political stability (*paragraph 94*).
- (xii) Although we do not believe that the United Kingdom Government should now agree to the inclusion of the "sovereignty issue", as presently defined by Argentina, on the agenda for talks in the immediate future, they should nonetheless be willing to discuss the means by which progress can be made to try to find a negotiated settlement with Argentina as requested by the United Nations (*paragraph 96*).
- (xiii) The United Kingdom Government could usefully adopt a more positive tone in its proposals for means of normalising relations between the two countries and should publicly offer specific incentives to Argentina to encourage greater flexibility on their part (*paragraph 97*).



- (xiv) HM Government should now announce that it intends to lift the Protection Zone around the Falklands as soon as a formal declaration of the end of hostilities is communicated by the Argentine Government through the Protecting Powers (*paragraph 97*).
- (xv) HM Government should now give a public undertaking that no further fortification of the Falkland Islands is being contemplated and that the size of the army, air force and naval presence in and around the Islands will be progressively reduced; such an undertaking would need, however, to be accompanied by a proviso that evidence of renewed hostile Argentine intentions towards the Islands would render the undertaking void (*paragraph 98*).
- (xvi) HM Government should consider making a public announcement of the non-sovereignty issues which it is prepared to discuss with Argentina (and possibly other neighbouring Latin American states) including possibly the exploitation and regulation of the hydrocarbon and fisheries resources in the area of the Falklands and Dependencies, without prejudice to the territorial claims of the countries concerned in the area (*paragraph 99*).
- (xvii) We do not believe that a British offer to go to legal arbitration over the sovereignty dispute would amount to much more than a gesture which would not in practice hasten the resolution of what is, essentially, a political rather than a legal dispute (*paragraph 102*).
- (xviii) Assuming that agreement is reached on proposals for changes in the internal Constitution of the Falkland Islands, HM Government should consider extending an invitation to the United Nations Decolonisation Committee to visit the Falklands (*paragraph 104*).
- (xix) If HM Government feels unable to pursue the idea of unilateral declarations recommended above (sub-paragraphs xiv-xvi), the possibility should be explored of the two governments making parallel moves forward towards the relaxation of military tension in the South Atlantic. It would seem to us more profitable to pursue the possibility of simultaneous declarations which, on each side, would be conditional on the observance by the other side of the accompanying undertakings (*paragraph 108*).
- (xx) It is very much to be regretted that the initial failure of bilateral talks between the two countries may further delay real progress towards the normalisation of commercial and diplomatic relations (*paragraph 109*).
- (xxi) A solution on the lines of leaseback cannot be easily contemplated by the United Kingdom at present in view of the understandable mistrust of Argentina amongst the Falklands population and uncertainties about the stability of the new democratic regime in Argentina and hence of the credence which a United Kingdom Government could give to any undertakings entered into by it. The most significant problem with such a solution is that it would, from the moment of agreement, provide recognition of Argentine rights which could not subsequently be withdrawn. Despite this, the passage of time may well make possible a reopening of discussions along these lines (*paragraph 112*).

- (xxii) In the long run a solution acceptable to the Falklands' immediate neighbours is essential to the Islanders themselves: neither independence nor incorporation in the United Kingdom could conceivably achieve that objective (*paragraph 114*).

*The economic and political development of the Islands*

- (xxiii) It is of vital importance that the United Kingdom should not merely rely on Article 73 of the UN Charter as a justification for its continued administration of the Falkland Islands, but should pursue, and be seen to be pursuing, the objectives set out in that Article, particularly with regard to the promotion of the economic and social advancement of the territory and the development of self-government within the territory (*paragraph 116*).

*Land reform*

- (xxiv) Although we accept that a gradual approach to land reform is probably both correct and inevitable (*paragraph 136*), we believe that there is little evidence that even this more limited approach is being pursued with the vigour required to tackle the undoubtedly serious situation described by Lord Shackleton in his 1976 and 1982 Reports and confirmed during our predecessors' visit to the Islands in 1983 (*paragraph 139*).

*Development and diversification*

- (xxv) The greatest emphasis in the Falklands' development programme should be placed on means of diversifying activities within the framework of the present agricultural economy and with the active participation of the present population of the Islands (*paragraph 142*).
- (xxvi) Although there is undoubtedly a strong case for the regulation and licensing of fishing in the area of the Falklands and Dependencies, we are not convinced that the establishment of an Exclusive Fishing Zone can be justified, in view of the considerable political and practical problems to be overcome (*paragraphs 145-6*).
- (xxvii) The Falkland Islands Government, rather than merely looking forward to the revenue which might accrue to them from the establishment of a Fishing Zone, should look more positively at the possibility of establishing an indigenous fishing fleet and at the opportunities created by the presence of trawler fleets in the area for the provision of commercial services for those fleets (*paragraph 147*).
- (xxviii) HM Government should pursue as a matter of priority the negotiation of emergency landing facilities at neighbouring airports to facilitate the licensing of civilian air services in and out of Mount Pleasant airport (*paragraph 149*).
- (xxix) The internal transport needs of the Falkland Islands should be examined in detail by the Falkland Islands Government (*paragraph 150*).
- (xxx) We echo Lord Shackleton's proposals in connection with the utilisation of wind generators, particularly in the Camp settlements (*paragraph 151*).

*Internal constitutional reform*

- (xxxi) The Legislative Council's proposals for internal constitutional reform are small, but significant, steps towards greater control by the Islanders over their internal affairs; we urge HM Government to expedite the remaining formalities before their acceptance, and recommend that the House should raise no objections to these proposals when the appropriate Order in Council is laid (*paragraph 162*).

*The Falkland Islands Development Corporation*

- (xxxii) As an urgent response to an allegedly critical situation, it is difficult to imagine any enterprise being proceeded with at a more funereal pace; this sluggishness has undoubtedly given rise to understandable, and justified, resentment in the Falkland Islands (*paragraph 167*).
- (xxxiii) The role of the Development Corporation is likely to be less significant than Lord Shackleton intended (*paragraph 169*).
- (xxxiv) The Falkland Islands Government and HM Government will need carefully to monitor the development of relations between the FIDC and the Legislative and Executive Councils in order to ensure that the reforms in local democracy recommended above (sub-paragraph xxxi) are not undermined by the independent operations of the Corporation (*paragraph 170*).
- (xxxv) The potential for misunderstanding, administrative complexity and policy incompatibility resulting from the establishment of the FIDC as an additional centre of power in the tiny Falklands community is great (*paragraph 171*).

*HM Government's stewardship in the Falklands*

- (xxxvi) It is not our view that, after the initial problems immediately following the South Atlantic conflict, the ODA or other UK Government agencies have been remiss in carrying out their duties in the Falkland Islands. We do, however, question whether Ministers and senior officials have sought to implement the rehabilitation and development programmes espoused by them with the vigour and enthusiasm consistent with the seriousness of the Islands' economic situation, or with the commitment which should have been expected from ministerial statements to the House (*paragraph 175*).
- (xxxvii) If a viable economy for the Falklands is to be put in place before the inevitable withdrawal of most of the garrison, time is now beginning to run out (*paragraph 177*).
- (xxxviii) A final judgement on the quality of HM Government's stewardship must await their reaction to our observations and the fruits of policies in train or those yet to be adopted (*paragraph 178*).