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FALKLAND ISLANDS DEBATE

My Secretary of State has told me that he will wish to dictate the outline of his closing speech tonight, and he will do this on return from this morning's OD(SA). We had yesterday evening prepared for him some notes - and these I enclose. Any comments on the general balance of these notes would be very welcome, since we may wish to draw upon them as we amend the closing speech in the light of points made during the debate.

I am copying this letter to John Holmes (FCO).

John and
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(D B OMAND)

A J Coles Esq

Mr Speaker,

Before I wind-up this debate I should like to make a few personal remarks.

The brutal seizure by force of the Falkland Islands and the dependencies has been a ~~humiliating~~^{deep} blow for this country, ^{and} for the Government: I feel it deeply.

2. There will be a time for inquests on what went wrong. That time is after we have returned the Falkland Islands to British administration.

3. I would only say this: that I believe that almost any reasonable man with experience of Government from whatever part of the House would have drawn the conclusions we did. ^{We were not alone in our assessment - amongst ourselves and friends} But we were wrong. We were not faced with reasonable people or a reasonable situation and our assessment of the situation was at fault. The responsibility for policy towards the Falklands Islands is carried out by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and Lord Carrington and his colleagues have shown by their action that they accept the consequences of this responsibility.

4. Responsibility is not something which can be excused away and it cannot be devolved to others. I too accept my share of responsibility and I informed the Prime Minister last weekend that I placed my office at her disposal.

Ms. Anne Nichols made it clear to me that she believed
5. My Rt Hon Friend *(* that it is my duty to stay
at my post and concentrate all my efforts to achieve the
Government's objective of the restoration of the Falkland
Islands to British administration. This I will do. I will
do it to the very best of my ability.

6. But before leaving the events of the past I would like to
deal conclusively with one accusation which has been made,
and that is that the Royal Navy, indeed the Armed Services
as a whole, were caught on the hop and were not ready to go to
war. If it were true I would admit it. But such a charge is
completely false. That we have assembled a task force of the
size and composition which we have should be convincing proof
of that.

7.

We were

only able to assemble such military might in such a short time because we had our plans ready, both in terms of fighting units and their essential logistic support. In the days preceding the sailing of the main elements of the task force there was a great deal of preparatory work. This involved the movement of troops, of weapons and stores of every kind. The checking in each ship of the task force of all the essential systems to ensure sea worthiness and operational readiness for a prolonged operation in the harsh weather conditions of the South Atlantic with long lines of communication. At the Royal Dockyards and naval stores depots and establishments there was a splendid response from the civilians of the Ministry of Defence who worked long hours, often throughout the night to get the Fleet ready. We are immensely grateful to them.

8. Another example of the readiness of our plans was the speed with which we were able to charter transport aircraft and acquire civilian ships by a variety of means by implementing existing plans: which had been practised in exercises against such a contingency. I myself flew from Portsmouth to Windsor on Sunday afternoon and there, with my Rt Hon Friends now Foreign Secretary and Lord President sought Her Majesty's approval for the Order in Council. I would like to express my thanks to the officials in my old Department, the Department of Trade, and to those concerned in the Shipping Industry for their co-operation. I will return later in my speech to the role of these ships.

the Governor, at his press conference, on his return to this country, praise the Royal Marines for (and I use his words) "their bravery and skill". Can anyone ever really have doubted that for one moment

9 Finally, before starting the main part of my speech, I would also like to clear away another misconception which may have arisen during the confusion immediately surrounding the invasion of the Falkland Islands and which was referred to last Saturday by the ^{Member for} Member for Down, South, and which was quite disgracefully carried as a story in a major National newspaper that the Royal Marines on the Falkland Islands had surrendered without firing a shot. I talked myself on Monday to Major Noot and Major Newman of the Royal Marines shortly after their arrival at Brize Norton. I learned from them at first hand of their spirited defence, of the way in which they had conducted themselves so as to inflict casualties on the enemy and even at one point take prisoners until called upon by the Governor, as was his duty, to cease resistance to avoid unnecessary loss of life to the Islanders and themselves in the face of overwhelming odds. A few days later there was an equally spirited defence of South Georgia in which the Royal Marines inflicted many casualties, including ^{several} killed, damaged an Argentine corvette, and destroyed a large Argentine helicopter.

10 These actions must have shown to those who may sometimes doubt the will and resolve of the British people that we will fight for what is ours; let there be no doubt about that.

11 I would also remind the House that the military preparations which we have seen being put into effect over the last few days must have demonstrated beyond any shadow of doubt to the Soviet Union and her satellites, and to any potential aggressor throughout the world that we have armed forces of the highest possible professional skills maintained at a high standard of readiness.

12. I do not believe that there can be a single Member of this House, indeed scarcely a citizen of these Islands who could have failed to have been moved by the sight of the Fleet putting to sea. I visited Portsmouth on Sunday to see for myself with the Port Admiral the final stage of preparation, and visited HMS HERMES, the Flag Ship of the task force. I talked to many of her crew and to the aircrew who are sailing with her, many of them from the Royal Naval Air Station, Culdrose in my own constituency. Together they represent a formidable fighting force. I asked them - did they have the weapons they needed - did they have the spares they needed; and yes, Mr Speaker, they did.

13. Mr Speaker, they were not indulging in mock-heroics or jingoistic sentiments. They were level headed young men, thoroughly professional in their approach, who were going to do their duty. Naturally, they asked me whether I thought they would see action. I replied to them, as I had said publicly on television earlier in the day, that we were not putting the largest task force available in the world outside the two major super powers, to sea, without the intention, if we have to, of using them. I told them that we had no wish to take human life and that we would seek to achieve the return of British Administration to the Islands by peaceful means. But

if we could not do so then they would have to fight. I could see that in those circumstances they would fight to win.

I should like the House to know just how formidable a force is now on the high seas heading for the South Atlantic. The carriers INVINCIBLE and HERMES, with augmented complements of Sea Harriers and Sea King helicopters, will be capable of launching a powerful attack against enemy surface ships and submarines. The Type 42 destroyers SHEFFIELD, GLASGOW and COVENTRY possess an effective anti capability in the Seadart missile which can also be engaged against surface warships. The County Class destroyers ANTRIM and GLAMORGAN, fitted with Seaslug, are also primarily equipped for anti-air warfare. But these destroyers can be used also to detect and destroy enemy submarines.

The Type 21 general purpose frigates ARROW, ALACRITY and ANTELOPE are fitted with the Exocet surface to surface missile system but can also attack submarines with their helicopters as can the Type 22 frigates BRILLIANT and BROADSWORD. These frigates are also fitted with Exocet and possess a good self defence in their Sea Wolf systems. Finally, the Type 12 frigates PLYMOUTH and YARMOUTH with their sonar and helicopters will add to the anti-submarine capability of the force. Mr Speaker, this is a well balanced force capable of taking on any maritime threat, be it airborne, surface or sub-surface. In addition, the force contains a sizeable amphibious lift capability in the assault ship HMS FEARLESS and the 5 landing ships.

So far I have concentrated on the warships which make up the striking edge of this Fleet. I must remind the House that the deployment and maintenance of this force will pose vast logistic problems, though ones that are not insuperable. The Fleet auxiliaries APPLELEAF, TIDESPING, PEARLEAF and OLMEDA

will provide tanker support; and the FORT AUSTIN which was already on her way to the Falklands when the Argentines invaded last Friday, RESOURCE and STROMNESS stores support. These vessels are manned by members of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, who are, like their surface counterparts, professionals in their specialist field with long experience of operating with the Royal Navy.

The House will also know that, as has been done so often in the past in time of national emergency, we have invoked the resources of the merchant marine to help sustain an undertaking on this scale. My Rt Hon Friend, the then Secretary of State for Trade informed the House on 5th April that arrangements were to be made to requisition or charter any vessels that might be necessary. The CANBERRA is to be used, like the Queens in the last war, as a troop transport; she will also provide hospital facilities should they be needed as well as rest and recuperation facilities for the members of the task force. Tankers and other support ships are also being chartered or requisitioned.

It would not be right for me to give precise details of the Royal Marines and soldiers who will be sailing with the task force. But I can tell the House that they include Royal Marine Commandos and soldiers of the Parachute Regiment, together with Signals, Artillery and supporting arms. Should it be necessary to carry out an amphibious assault, sufficient manpower will be available for the purpose. The Royal Marines who fought so gallantly against overwhelming odds last week at Port Stanley and Grytviken have already showed that they are more than a match for the Argentine forces.

Mr Speaker, we have heard in the House today the voices of some who doubt the wisdom of preparing to use force, should peaceful means fail. I cannot share that view. When you stop a dictator there are always risks, but as my Rt Hon Friend the Prime Minister said recently, there are great risks in not stopping a dictator - a lesson this nation has learnt before.

There are also those who doubt our military capability to mount or to sustain the level of operations that may - also - be needed in the end. There are those who suggest that we should now reconsider the plans for the defence programme we announced last June.

Our defence programme is shaped round the response to the Soviet threat. In terms of the sea/air battle our plans give emphasis to our maritime air and submarine effort - and it is right that they should.

Nevertheless, as we said in Cmnd 8288, there will remain a wide range of tasks in peace and war for which surface ships are uniquely suited; and we must therefore retain a large and versatile ocean going surface fleet.

Mr Speaker, we have a large and versatile surface fleet. And a significant element of it is now at sea.

Nothing in our recent review will prevent us from retaining such a capability in future years. We intend to sustain a strong and effective Navy. A major ship construction programme is currently in train - £400m worth of orders placed last year - and many aspects of its fighting capability are being greatly improved. This financial year we will be spending £ $\frac{1}{2}$ bn more

in real terms on the Navy than was spent in the year before we came to office. As to the future we will still be spending more on the conventional Navy, even when expenditure on modernising the strategic deterrent is at its peak, than we were in 1978/79. In the late 80s and beyond our capability for out-of-area emergencies will be performed by the new carriers HMS ILLUSTRIOUS now on sea trials and HMS ARK ROYAL now building. I make no apologies to the House for saying once again that, after the two super-powers, our naval capability will remain second to none.

Hon Members will realise that the ^{task} force
is well equipped, balanced, powerful and above all flexible.
Its flexibility is important. There are a range of military
options open to us. We will select the right one as the situation
demands. I recognise of course that simply saying that there
is a range of options open to us does not tell Hon Members much
but I hope they will understand that I cannot divulge what our
plans are. Security must be uppermost in our minds.

Mr Speaker I would like to urge the House to say nothing in
public that gives comfort or assistance to Argentina.

We are taking steps to remind newspaper editors and others
concerned of their responsibility to the nation at a time like
this. It is not helpful to have fireside strategists speculating
about the operations which the Task Force might undertake. The
old phrase "Careless talk costs lives" is as valid now as ever it
was. Mr Speaker, there is one point I should make very clear:
the deployment of a formidable Task Force does not mean that
this Government has abandoned diplomacy in seeking to recover
the Falkland Islands from Argentine military occupation.

As my Rt Hon Friend, the Foreign Secretary, has said, we
were greatly encouraged by the mandatory resolution endorsed
by the UN Security Council condemning the Argentine invasion
and calling for the immediate withdrawal of all their forces.
A call that Argentina has rejected. Yesterday's communique by
the European Commission is another indication of the growing
international revulsion at Argentine's actions.

My Rt Hon Friend has said that he will continue to urge our friends and allies to take measures to increase the pressure on Argentina.

For our part my Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State for Trade announced yesterday the imposition of a ban on imports from Argentina. This measure is in addition to the freezing of assets, the denial of export credit and the embargo on the supply of arms and military equipment already announced. These measures, combined with the despatch of a powerful Task Force, can leave Argentina in no doubt about our intention to return British Administration to the Falkland Island.

We hope to be able to find a peaceful solution.

But if diplomatic efforts fail, a military solution will be necessary. That means fighting if we have to rid the Falkland Islands of Argentine military occupation. We are not thirsting for Argentine blood, some of which has already been spilled by our Royal Marines, but there is no question of acquiescing in the isolation of international law and the rights of the inhabitants of the Falkland Islands. To this end we have sent a Task Force capable of taking whatever action is required.

The Argentine Government should be under no illusion. We are in earnest. And we shall have no hesitation in making use of the resources at our disposal should it be necessary. I know that the House will join me in paying tribute to all those involved in this enterprise and wish them God speed.



Briefing Note

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THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

Despite repeated assurances by the Argentine government that they were committed to a negotiated settlement, Argentine forces invaded and took control of the Falkland Islands on 2nd April 1982. During the debate in the House of Commons the following day, the Prime Minister declared:

"It is the Government's objective to see that the islands are freed from occupation and are returned to British administration at the earliest possible moment." (Hansard, 3rd April 1982, p.5)

The Government's Handling of the Crisis. While there were a number of references in recent months in the Argentine press to the possibility of an invasion, many were the work of just one journalist. Government statements reflected a harder line than that taken by the previous administration; but the British Government considered that overall evidence showed that the Argentinians remained committed, at least for the coming months, to finding a solution. The Argentinians also made repeated assurances to the United States as well as to Britain that they continued to give priority to a negotiated settlement on sovereignty. Bellicose statements have often been made by the Argentine press, and to some extent by the Argentine government, but in the end the crisis passed over. The British Government therefore concluded that there was no immediate threat to the Falkland Islands, especially as the latest round of talks between the two governments in New York at the end of February appeared to have established a basis for further negotiations. Even when scrap metal merchants landed on South Georgia on 19th March, there was no sudden heightening of tension, and first reports were that the Argentinians were willing to settle that problem by diplomatic means. Later sifting of information at Ministerial instigation confirmed that the decision to invade the Falkland Islands was not taken before 28th March, and possibly one or two days later, and that it might have been an unpremeditated seizing of the opportunity provided by the South Georgia incident. Certainly senior members of the American administration have told the British Government since the invasion that they were taken completely by surprise.

Criticism has been expressed of the Government's lack of military preparedness. As the Prime Minister said on 3rd April: "First, even if ships had been instructed to sail the day that the Argentines landed on South Georgia to clear the whaling station, the ships could not possibly have got to Port Stanley before the invasion. Secondly, there have been several occasions in the past when an invasion has been threatened. The only way of being certain to prevent an invasion would have been to keep a very large fleet close to the Falkland Islands, when we are some 8,000 miles away from base. No government has ever been able to do that, and the cost would be enormous." (Hansard, p.8)

Argentina's Motives. As Mr. Francis Pym, the new Foreign Secretary, stated in the House of Commons on 7th April: "Why did Argentina's ruler suddenly decide in the last days of March to resort to arbitrary and brutal aggression? I suggest that part of the answer lies in the very brutality and unpopularity of the Argentine regime itself..... Only a few days before the invasion of the Falkland Islands there had been riots in Buenos Aires and many people had been arrested. Harassed by political unrest at home, and beset by mounting economic difficulties, the regime turned desperately to a cynical attempt to arouse jingoism among its people. The Falkland Islanders have thus become the victims of the unprincipled opportunism of a morally bankrupt regime."

Government Action since the Invasion. Since the 2nd April, the Government has:

- * obtained the passage of a Security Council resolution condemning the invasion, and calling for an immediate withdrawal of all Argentine forces and a diplomatic solution.
- * broken off diplomatic relations with Argentina.
- * frozen Argentine assets in this country.
- * stopped export credits and banned the exports of arms to Argentina.
- * imposed an embargo on the import of all goods from Argentina.
- * urged a large number of friendly countries to take measures of their own.
- * has despatched a large naval task force towards the South Atlantic, the most powerful force Britain has ever put to sea in peacetime and fully adequate for any action that may be required in exercise of our undoubted right of self-defence under the U.N. Charter.

Britain's Naval Strength. Any suggestion that our capacity to respond to the crisis has been weakened by a run-down in the strength of the Navy is nonsense. Equally, it is quite untrue that the Trident decision would inhibit Britain from mounting a similar naval task force in the years to come. The fact that the fleet has been able to put to sea, prepared for action in 4 days, reflects great credit on the Royal Navy.

There will be more ships and submarines operational in 1985 than there are today. It is the Government's intention to keep two aircraft carriers into the 1990s. 'Illustrious' will join the fleet later this year and will replace 'Invincible', when it is sold to Australia next year. 'Ark Royal' will replace the old carrier 'Hermes' in 1985. A massive modernization programme for the fleet is in hand. The principal threat to our peace and freedom will continue to come from the Soviet Union and we are increasing the numbers of our nuclear submarines - the main threat to the Soviet fleet - from 12 to 17.

This financial year we will be spending £½ billion more in real terms on the Navy than in the year before we came into office. Trident has had a minimal effect on the Defence budget so far, and it will only be taking an average of 3% of the budget over the next 18 years. In the future, we will still be spending more on the conventional Navy, even when expenditure on Trident is at its peak.

The Government's Objective. In the days ahead, the government will seek a diplomatic solution that will ensure a withdrawal of Argentine forces from the Falkland Islands. But should this prove impossible, the choice is clear. As Mr. John Nott, Secretary of State for Defence said:

"We are going to restore British administration to the Falkland Islands we mean to stick to it even if we have to fight."
("Weekend World" 4th April 1982)

And as Mr. Pym later said:

"We would much prefer a peaceful settlement. We will do all we can to get one. And we shall welcome and support all serious efforts to that end But if our efforts fail, the Argentine regime will know what to expect: Britain does not appease dictators.....If the world does not oblige Argentina to restore their rights tomorrow it will be someone else's turn to suffer aggression and occupation. The world will become an even more dangerous place."
(House of Commons, 7th April 1982)