



DPP 06119

Mr. Cheshire.

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Mr Tait

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FALKLANDS ENQUIRY: 1977 TASK FORCE

1. As the papers will show, I was Head of South America Department at the time when the Labour Government sent a secret task force to the Falklands. There are two points about this which may however not be clear from the papers and which I think should be put on record.
2. Firstly, I do not believe that the sending of this task force was ever disclosed at the time to the Argentine Government. I recall that Dr Owen was anxious that we should announce, after the recall of the task force, that it had been sent since this would have been good for the morale of the Falkland Islanders. However, at the time the MOD were very much against this because they said it would make it harder to mount any such operation in secret on a future occasion. I was unaware that the operation had ever been disclosed before Mr Callaghan mentioned it in the House of Commons earlier this year. I was therefore surprised when I heard Dr Owen claim in a television interview that he had told the Argentines what he was doing and that this had deterred their aggression at the time. This is a material point because if the operation was not disclosed to the Argentine authorities it clearly did not serve any deterrent purpose. When talking to Mr David Stephens (Political Adviser to Dr Owen at that period) the other night this question came up and Mr Stephens said categorically that he was convinced the Argentines had never been told of the operation by Dr Owen and that it had always remained secret. It would indeed have been strange if the information had been passed to the Argentines and there was no evidence of this on FCO files.
3. The second point is that when the last round of negotiations with the Argentines about the Falklands came unstuck at the beginning of March this year (ie when the Government in Buenos Aires repudiated the communiqué agreed by Mr Luce and Sr Ros in New York on 26 February 1982) I thought it was right that Ministers should be aware that the option of sending a secret task force to the area had been successfully used on a previous occasion. I therefore consulted the PUS (after his morning meeting on 5 March) about the propriety of telling Lord Carrington about this operation; Sir M Palliser confirmed that this would be proper while reminding me that Lord Carrington should not be shown any papers which had gone to Dr Owen about it. (Sir M Palliser has subsequently confirmed to me that he recalls this conversation.) I accordingly raised this matter at a meeting at 11.30 the same day with the Secretary of State and Mr Luce. I said quite explicitly that there was one

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option of which I thought they should be aware and went on to describe briefly what happened in 1977. (Mr Fearn, who attended this meeting, recalls this part of the discussion.)

J B Ure

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29 April 1982

Mr Fearn/SAmD (to enter).

Mr Ure's minute has now been seen by the PUS and Mr Day. I suggest it could be entered and put away.

M L Tait . 9/6.
M L Tait
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