

(64)

Mr Ure  
PS/Mr Luce

PS/plus

## HMS ENDURANCE

1. Mr Luce has said he would like to minute the Secretary of State, proposing a further approach to the Ministry of Defence on the problem of the withdrawal of HMS Endurance.
2. I submit a draft minute which covers a draft minute from the Secretary of State to Mr Nott. [Defence Department concur.]

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INDEX	PA	Action Taken

P. R. Fearn

P R Fearn  
South America Department

2 November 1981

cc: Defence Department

Mr Ure

cc Mr Gillmore  
SAmD

1. While Defence Department do not dissent from the general thrust of the draft minute, I have to record my reservation about the proposal that the Secretary of State be advised to minute Mr Nott personally on the matter. My hesitation relates to the wider FCO interest that Mr Nott's Defence Programme Review be given a chance to succeed. Lord Carrington has recently attended a meeting of MISC 62, at which Mr Nott had to defend his own cash figures for the defence budget over the next few years against Treasury attempt to cut it back again which, if successful, would involve further programme cuts by the MOD in the next financial year totalling some £400 million. The Secretary of State was briefed to support Mr Nott's case because of the wider Alliance implications of being

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seen to falter again in defence spending so soon after Mr Nott's June review. Even if Mr Nott's figures carry the day with the Treasury, the prospect is not rosy. In addition MOD have been saddled with the costs of our contribution to the Sinai MFO and Mr Nott is being pressed by the Secretary of State (and indeed the Prime Minister) to show flexibility about MOD military training charges for foreign customers, in the wider foreign and defence policy interest.

2. In the circumstances I wonder whether it is entirely realistic to ask the Secretary of State personally to take up the cause of HMS Endurance. If we must return to the charge, perhaps it could be done by the Minister of State writing to Mr Blaker.

*P J Weston*  
P J Weston  
Defence Department

3 November 1981

PS/PUS  
PS/Mr Luce

1. We know that Mr Blaker is already on our side in this and I fear that if we are going to have a chance of getting the decision reversed it is a question of a minute from the Secretary of State or nothing. The arguments are not all one way.

2. On the one hand, we could reasonably take the view that it is for the MOD to defend this cut and that all questions on the subject should be firmly referred to them. I see force in Mr Weston's point that it is not a general FCO interest to untie Mr Nott's defence cuts package. It can also be argued that we have gone too far for HMG to change its mind on this: the PM has herself gone on the record; it does not look good to keep on responding to pressure groups (BBC etc); and there are no new factors which we can adduce to rationalise a change of policy. In practice there is not a great deal that Endurance does which cannot be done by one or other of the two British Antarctic Survey ice ships. Endurance has been under financial threat for many years and her commission has been extended on an annual basis; she might not survive long even if we win this

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round and we might find we had merely postponed a problem till a worse moment in our relations with the Falkland Islanders.

3. On the other hand, it is certainly the case that political implications are being read into the withdrawal of HMS Endurance and that these are in FCO fields of interest (Falklands and Antarctica). It will not be possible to disassociate ourselves from the decision to lay her up without disloyalty to Government policy as a whole. If the decision is to be reversed, better now than later when pressure inside and outside Parliament may have built up embarrassingly.

A 4. On balance, I still think the decision to axe Endurance was wrong (for the reasons originally given) and that it will not use up a great deal of the Secretary of State's powder to fire this final small shot across Mr Nott's bows. I therefore support Mr Fearn's recommendation and drafts,

*Burg*

J B Ure

3 November 1981

cc:

Sir A Acland  
Mr Day o/r  
Mr Gillmore  
Mr Fearn, SAMD  
Mr Weston, Defence Department

*Ref*

**DRAFT:** minute/letter/teleletter/despatch/note

**TYPE:** Draft/Final 1+

**FROM:**

Reference

Mr Luce

**DEPARTMENT:**

**TEL. NO:**

**SECURITY CLASSIFICATION**

**TO:**

Your Reference

Top Secret

Secret

Confidential

Restricted

Unclassified

Secretary of State

**Copies to:**

PS/LPS

PS/Mr Hurd

PS/PUS

Mr Day

Mr Ure

Mr Gillmore

Mr Fearn, SAMD

Mr Weston, Defence Dept

**PRIVACY MARKING**

**SUBJECT:** HMS ENDURANCE

.....In Confidence

**CAVEAT**.....

A

1. I am increasingly uneasy about the decision to withdraw HMS Endurance from service in 1982. HMS Endurance is the Royal Navy's only ice-patrol ship and she has been deployed for several months of each year in the area of the Falkland Islands and the British Antarctic Territory.

2. As you will recall, the decision to pay HMS Endurance off was taken as part of this year's defence review. You wrote to John Nott before the announcement was made setting out the FCO arguments for HMS Endurance's retention. But these did not carry the day. Since then, I understand that MOD Ministers have on several occasions looked again at the possibility of retaining HMS Endurance in service, but have decided that the cost of doing so (about £4m per annum) would be too high.

3. The announcement of the ship's withdrawal has, as we expected, led to widespread protest. You might be interested to see the attached correspondence between the Prime Minister and Sir Peter Scott, and with Lord Buxton, whose film on the Falklands, shown on TV on 25 October, was, inter alia, very critical of the withdrawal. A further BBC television discussion programme on the Falklands on 2 November also condemned the decision on political grounds. MOD

**Enclosures—flag(s)**.....

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Ministers have received numerous letters from Members of Parliament. I now understand that our own back-benchers are prepared to try to force the Government to reverse the decision: and that the Foreign Affairs Committee may wish to take up the issue.

4. The line taken by those protesting at the decision follows very closely the arguments which you yourself used in your minute to the Secretary of State for Defence. This puts us in an unhappy position since, while the decision on withdrawal was taken on grounds of defence economies, the criticism is being levelled almost exclusively at the political implications. We have as necessary made clear that the decision was taken by the whole Government and have rejected attempts to suggest that there is a rift between the FCO and the MOD on this matter. (eg Ian Gilmour's letter of 13 August to Lord Shackleton). The MOD are naturally taking the lead in responding to the criticism; but a good deal of it washes off against the FCO and we can expect to be a main target in parliamentary exchanges. The decision is being interpreted as a step in a perceived FCO policy of withdrawing from the Falkland Islands and thus putting pressure on the Islanders to come to an agreement with Argentina. Our démentis have predictably little effect. The withdrawal is also seen as demonstrating our lack of commitment to and interest in Antarctica.

5. It is difficult enough to carry our back-benchers with us on Falkland policies at the best of times; the withdrawal of HMS Endurance will only increase our problems. It would, therefore, in my view, be very much in our political interests to try again to persuade the Secretary of State for Defence to change his mind. We have already made clear to the Ministry of Defence that we would be reluctant to endorse their proposal that HMS Endurance should be sold next year to the Brazilians and I now understand unofficially that John Nott has agreed that the potential political embarrassment if this sale were to go ahead would be too great. The Ministry of Defence are apparently now thinking in terms of offering the ship to the British Antarctic Survey (who are most unlikely to want her), or otherwise simply putting her in mothballs until such (unlikely) time as an uncontroversial buyer can be found.

6. I do not know what the chances are of reversing the MOD decision. Certainly we are not in a position to offer to pay any of HMS Endurance's costs. But I am sure we must do all we can to put the political arguments for retaining her, which for us must far outweigh the financial ones for withdrawing her. I hope that you agree and attach a draft letter you may wish to send to John Nott.

DS (Revised)

DRAFT: minute/letter/teleletter/despatch/note

TYPE: Draft/Final 1+

FROM:

Reference

Secretary of State

DEPARTMENT:

TEL. NO:

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION

TO:

Your Reference

Top Secret

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The Rt Hon John Nott MP  
Secretary of State for Defence

Copies to:

PRIVACY MARKING

SUBJECT: HMS ENDURANCE

.....In Confidence

CAVEAT.....

1. In my minute FCS/81/70 I put the political arguments for her retention in service of HMS Endurance. The decision was nevertheless taken, as part of the defence review, to withdraw her from service next year.

2. The news of her withdrawal has, as expected, led to widespread protest, including correspondence with the Prime Minister. The decision is being depicted in some quarters as a stage in a deliberate British policy of withdrawal from the Falkland Islands in order to put pressure on the Islanders to agree to a settlement with Argentina: and as demonstrating a lack of commitment to our sovereignty position (and to the related economic potential) in Antarctica. Our denials are having little effect. I now understand that a group of Conservative back-benchers are to try to have the issue re-opened and the decision reversed: and that the Foreign Affairs Committee are taking a critical interest.

Enclosures—flag(s).....

3. I fully understand the defence reasons for the withdrawal of HMS Endurance. But I do wonder whether the financial cost of retaining her in service is worth the high political cost we are having to face. I would value an opportunity to discuss this with you.