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Mr A Smith  
2/1/83

1. Would you please let me have by ~~Wednesday 12 Jan~~ the draft (~~in duplicate~~) of a letter for the Secretary of State to send to ~~Mr. (Sir) Hon. David Owen M.P.~~ in reply to E1. If the draft reply is not self-explanatory, it should be accompanied by a short minute providing background information.

2. The above deadline has been set to accord with the Secretary of State's wish that replies which he sends to such letters should be answered speedily. If you are unable to provide the draft by the above date you should telephone this office to discuss the action which needs to be taken in the interim.

3. I should be grateful if you would bear in mind the following points:

a. Drafts should be informal in tone. Members of Parliament will usually show the reply to their constituents, unless specifically asked not to do so.

b. Any departmental action which might prejudice the Minister's decision must now be suspended until the case has been considered by the Secretary of State.

c. The draft reply should be cleared at a level not lower than Principal.

*[Signature]*  
(D T PIPER)  
ADS/Secretary of State  
Room 6164  
Tel: 218 6169/7899

H. January 21

AD: S & S

Sections

DS

CC send



I have received a letter in reply to Dr. Cooper's letter

2<sup>nd</sup> January 1982

C. S. Hamilton

DS

MS 9391 3985 MB

DRAFT

1. Thank you for your letter of 21 December to Humphrey Atkins concerning the decision to withdraw HMS ENDURANCE. I have been asked to reply.<sup>15</sup> HMS ENDURANCE has, of course, been a familiar sight in the South Atlantic and Antarctic for many years, and during her annual deployment she has performed a wide variety of useful work. Her presence has undeniably helped underline our commitment to the defence of British interests in the South Atlantic. She will inevitably be missed and the decision to pay her off was by no means easy. That said it is important to bear in mind that HMS ENDURANCE has only a limited military capability and she is not essential to the maintenance of our defence commitment to the Falkland Islands.

2. The problem we have faced is one of resources. As you know, last year I carried out a thorough reappraisal of the defence programme in order to ensure that the several roles undertaken by our armed forces are carried out to best a most economic effect. This must be my first concern as the Secretary of State for Defence. Notwithstanding the fact that we have decided to plan on a real increase in defence expenditure, the dramatic escalation of defence costs made it necessary to take some hard decisions including a reduction in the size of the surface fleet. Against this background I had reluctantly to conclude that the relatively limited contribution made by HMS ENDURANCE to our defence capability did not justify the continued expense of running her. It is, however, intended that Royal Navy ships should continue to deploy to the South Atlantic from time to time though obviously less frequently than HMS ENDURANCE has been able to

3. The decision should not be seen as in any way affecting our policy towards the Falkland Islands. As you know well, we have no doubt about the legitimacy of our sovereignty over the Islands and we are determined to ensure that the Islands' territorial integrity is preserved. We remain committed to the defence of that integrity and shall continue to maintain the Royal Marines Garrison on the Falkland Islands at its present strength, as a tangible and constant demonstration of that commitment.

4. Nor does the decision on HMS ENDURANCE imply any diminution of our interest in Antarctica. <sup>Her</sup> Its withdrawal will not seriously affect the British Antarctic Survey, which will continue to operate ships of its own in Antarctic waters. Our active Antarctic programme is the envy of many other countries.

5. You raise the question of Britain's economic interest in the development of the resources of the region. We are well aware of the importance of developing the maritime resources of the Falkland Islands and of the Falkland Island Dependencies. But it will remain difficult to do so without progress towards a solution of the dispute with Argentina, on which a further round of Anglo-Argentine talks is to take place in the near future. In Antarctica all the parties to the Antarctic Treaty are about to engage in the negotiation of a regime to exploit the mineral resources of the area within the framework of the Treaty itself. The establishment of such a regime will provide the necessary conditions for commercial investment. It is in everyone's interest that exploitation should proceed on an agreed basis rather than for individual countries to press their separate claims and so risk breakdown of international

cooperation in the Antarctic. The objective in the negotiations will naturally be to secure the maximum benefit for Britain.

6. The decision on HMS ENDURANCE was not taken lightly, and I hope that what I have said will help to put the decision in perspective. I hope that I have also been able to indicate our determination both to see to it that the interests of the Falkland Islanders continue to be upheld and to ensure that our important economic interests in the region are successfully pursued.



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

23 December 1981

*Mr D Owen*

Thank you for your letter of 21 December to Mr Atkins regarding plans to phase out the Research Vessel Endurance.

As this subject is more the concern of the Ministry of Defence, I am sending your letter to Mr Nott's office who will, I am sure, reply to you direct.

*Yours sincerely*

*M A Arthur*

M A Arthur  
PS/Lord Privy Seal

The Rt Hon Dr David Owen MP  
House of Commons  
London SW1A 0AA

From The Rt Hon Dr David Owen MP

42355

*Atkins*



*Dr Owen*

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

21st December, 1981

Rt Hon Humphrey Atkins MP  
Lord Privy Seal  
Foreign & Commonwealth Office  
Downing Street  
London  
SW1

I have heard that there are plans to phase out the Research Vessel Endurance.

I opposed this a few years ago when the issue came up and I am concerned that it should again be considered as an option. On grounds of our interest in the Antarctic and Falkland Islands it seems to be a false economy and I would be grateful for your assurance that there is no question of phasing out Endurance.

David Owen