



10 DOWNING STREET

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THE PRIME MINISTER

7 January 1982

Dear Mr. Neidham,

Thank you for your letter of 4 January about HMS Endurance.

I would not dispute that the presence of HMS Endurance helps to underline our commitment to the defence of British interests in the South Atlantic. The decision to pay her off this year was not an easy one to take. But the Government has to see to it that the resources allocated to defence are spent to the very best effect. Given the reductions that are to be made elsewhere in the size of the surface fleet (including the paying off of a carrier, two assault ships and a number of destroyers and frigates) as part of the reshaping of our maritime forces, the relatively limited contribution made by HMS Endurance to our defence capability does not justify the continued expense of running her. I regret this as much as you do.

Without in any way belittling the useful work carried out by HMS Endurance over the years in support of our interests and in assisting the activities of the British Antarctic Survey, I think it is important not to over-estimate her role. Despite the valuable assistance rendered by her and her predecessors, she has not been indispensable for the effective conduct of BAS operations.

I cannot accept your view that her paying off means that we have lost interest in the Falkland Islands, their Dependencies or even our stake in Antarctica. We are in no doubt about the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands and we are determined to ensure that the Islands' territorial integrity is preserved. We shall

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continue to maintain the permanent Royal Marine Garrison at its present strength on the Islands as a demonstration of our commitment.

I hope that what I have said will help to put the decision into perspective and also indicate the Government's determination to see to it that the interests of the Falkland Islanders continue to be upheld.

Yours sincerely
Margaret Thatcher

C.E. Needham, Esq.