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SOUTH ATLANTIC PRESENTATION UNIT (SAPU)

Attached for information is a transcript of the press conference given by the Secretary of State for Defence, Mr John Nott, on 3 May 1982

Cabinet Office

4 May 1982

Over the past 4 weeks since the invasion of the Falkland Islands my colleague the Foreign Secretary has rightly taken the leading role in explaining HMG's policies to the International and National Press.

The manner in which he has performed this role is evidence that our overriding aim will always remain a peaceful and lasting settlement for the future of the Falkland Islands. Military pressure is not - and must never be, an end in itself. It will remain merely one part of the search for a peaceful solution.

We must never forget that the Islands are British and are settled by people of British descent - and they have been invaded by an aggressor who must now withdraw.

But there is also a wider purpose in our endeavours. It is to ensure that armed aggression does not pay. Let our response as a member of the Western Alliance be an example that the Western democracies will respond to defend those principles which they hold dear.

So it is our solemn purpose to achieve the military objectives to which, reluctantly, we have been compelled, using the minimum of force and with the least loss of life on both sides, commensurate of course with our overriding duty to defend our own ships, aircraft and men.

Every action taken by our forces will remain under the strictest political direction and control, although decisions on the ground must be made by the Commanders on the spot. Each move that we have made in this affair has been determined by the need to bring home to those who apparently believe in force, that force cannot triumph

Every so often we must remind ourselves how we got here in the first place. We did not fire the first shot. It was only as the result of the skill of the Royal Marines on the Falkland Islands and in South Georgia, faced with armed attack, that our men did not suffer serious casualties and loss of life.

Let me then say a very few words on recent military events. The past week has been a notably successful one for our forces in the South Atlantic. It has already provided evidence of their skill and the quality of their equipment.

Over a week ago we had warned the Argentines that any approach on the part of their warships or aircraft which could amount to a threat to interfere with the mission of our Forces anywhere in the South Atlantic would encounter the appropriate response. We also made it clear that all Argentinian aircraft including civil aircraft and all their merchant vessels or fishing vessels engaging in surveyance of our Forces would be regarded as hostile and would be liable to be dealt with accordingly. If their Forces constitute a threat the Task Force Commander has the authority - and it is right that he should have the authority - to respond in self defence. I would like to reiterate this warning. We cannot accept any interference with our Forces wherever they may be. The action against the cruiser, General Belgrano, yesterday evening was fully consistent with our duty to defend our ships and men.

The announcement today of the bringing forward of 5 Brigade's notice is another demonstration of our resolve. This is not an escalatory move. It is merely prudent when contemplating operations - of whatever kind - so far from this country to have resources available nearer the area of operations.

The Argentine Government knows that there is one quick and simple way to avoid further casualties to their personnel and loss of their ships and aircraft - it is to keep out of the zones declared by us and to cease threatening and attacking our forces in the South Atlantic. Furthermore there is one quick and simple way to stop the fighting and that is for them to take their garrison off the Falklands in compliance with UN Resolution 502. Then negotiations for a peaceful long term solution can be resumed.

The information given to you here by our spokesman, Ian McDonald, will be based on fact, not on propaganda. The distances involved are very large between here and the operational area. Our forces may be engaged in action

so that our initial reports may be less full than we would wish. You have already shown that you are not prepared to act merely as a channel for Argentine propaganda. Freedom of reporting, as it is here, is not available in Buenos Aires, and brings with it the need for balance that has always been the hallmark of a free press. Closest to our concern must be the anxiety of the families and friends of those in the Task Force.

I do not pretend that our forces face an easy task. Early success is certainly encouraging. We are confident that our mission will be successful but we will never be over-confident nor will we boast of our success.

Perhaps in conclusion I can quote the most famous of our naval heroes Admiral Nelson who said that: "magnanimity in victory will be the main aim of the British fleet".

MOD PRESS BRIEFING MADE BY MR JOHN NOTT, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE ON
3 MAY 82 AT 2030 HOURS IN CONCOURSE HALL, MAIN BUILDING

Q. You talk about the minimum use of force - was the attack the British made really using the minimum amount of force?

A. If there is a threat to our ships and men we have no possible option but to respond to that threat. Our first duty is to protect our own men and therefore it was quite correct that we attacked in the way we did.

Q. Is Britain engaged in a war with Argentina?

A. Certainly we have hostilities with the Argentines. It is not in legal terms, however, a war, although the ordinary layman would class it as a war. We have the right of self-defence under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.

Q. Does the right to self-defence include the right to invade the Island if necessary?

A. We would operate in self-defence under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. These Islands are British.

Q. What would be your description of the way things have gone and the prospects ahead?

A. There does not seem to be a will to settle this matter by peaceful means on the Argentine side. I hope we can settle the matter peacefully.

Q. Do you expect it to be a bloody conflict?

A. I sincerely hope not. There is still time for a peaceful solution.

Q. Have the Americans to date aided any of the missions?

A. We have received no military assistance from the United States. Nor will we seek it. We were naturally delighted at the offer of materiel support but there are further talks going on about that. It has only been talked about in general terms so far. It may be in the form of logistic support.

Q. What is your response to the claims that have been coming from the Argentines?

A. We have made it quite clear that many of the claims coming from Buenos Aires are just inaccurate. We will do our utmost to give you facts.

Q. In the light of your early success what do you think it will take to make the Argentines surrender?

A. I don't wish for a surrender as such. We want a withdrawal from the Falkland Islands and then we are prepared to go into negotiations for the long term future of the Islands. We have always made that quite clear.

Q. Could we have finished the cruiser off completely?

A. I should imagine it would have been possible.

Q. Would it be the policy of the Royal Navy to assist if there are any survivors from an attack?

A. I believe the Royal Navy dropped some rescue equipment for the crew of the patrol craft that was sunk. I would hope where it is possible we can exercise every opportunity of helping in the rescue of any Argentines in that position, including the use of our medical and hospital facilities.

Q. What can you do to slow down the pace of military hostilities so that there is some chance of negotiations?

A. It has been 4 weeks now. Ever since the invasion the Argentines have continued to build up their forces on the Islands. They attacked South Georgia after Resolution 2062 was passed.

Q. The boot now seems on the other foot on the military level - are we going to give them a breathing space?

A. We will maintain the initiative on the military level. We will maintain the form of pressure on the Argentines to change their minds. They must withdraw their troops.

Q. Are you in charge of the Task Force or is Admiral Woodward - who is giving the orders?

A. The Task Force remains quite clearly under overall political supervision and control ultimately, of course, under the direction of the Prime Minister. All the actions they have taken have been based on Rules of Engagement agreed at a political level and that will remain the case. The tactical decisions must be a matter for Admiral Woodward; it cannot be any other way.

Q. What advice can you give to the Falkland Islanders to preserve their own safety in the light of any action the British will take?

A. We are doing our best to keep them informed of what is happening. The majority of the Falkland Islanders are believed to be in the countryside and not in Port Stanley. The safety of the Islanders themselves is paramount in any action we take.

Q. If the use of military force is one of the tools you are using to try to pressurize the Argentines do you feel you have a lot of room left to apply more force?

A. We have a great deal left and will continue to use military means in parallel to our genuine attempt to achieve a diplomatic solution to this problem.