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CC(82) 33rd
Conclusions

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CABINET

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet
held at 10 Downing Street on

TUESDAY 15 JUNE 1982

at 10.15 am

PRESENT

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon William Whitelaw MP Secretary of State for the Home Department	The Rt Hon Lord Hailsham Lord Chancellor
The Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Howe QC MP Chancellor of the Exchequer	The Rt Hon Sir Keith Joseph MP Secretary of State for Education and Science
The Rt Hon James Prior MP Secretary of State for Northern Ireland	The Rt Hon John Nott MP Secretary of State for Defence
The Rt Hon Michael Heseltine MP Secretary of State for the Environment	The Rt Hon Nicholas Edwards MP Secretary of State for Wales
The Rt Hon Patrick Jenkin MP Secretary of State for Industry	The Rt Hon John Biffen MP Lord President of the Council
The Rt Hon David Howell MP Secretary of State for Transport	The Rt Hon Norman Fowler MP Secretary of State for Social Services
The Rt Hon Leon Brittan QC MP Chief Secretary, Treasury	The Rt Hon Baroness Young Lord Privy Seal
The Rt Hon Nigel Lawson MP Secretary of State for Energy	The Rt Hon Norman Tebbit MP Secretary of State for Employment
The Rt Hon Cecil Parkinson MP Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Paymaster General	The Rt Hon Lord Cockfield Secretary of State for Trade

SECRET

THE FOLLOWING WERE ALSO PRESENT

The Rt Hon Sir Michael Havers QC MP
Attorney General

The Rt Hon Michael Jopling MP
Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury

SECRETARIAT

Sir Robert Armstrong
Mr A D S Goodall
Mr R L L Facer

SUBJECT

FALKLAND ISLANDS

SECRET

FALKLAND
ISLANDS

Previous
reference:
C(82) 32nd
conclusions

THE LORD CHANCELLOR said that he was sure that he would be speaking for every member of the Cabinet in offering congratulations to the Prime Minister on the courage and clarity of purpose which she had displayed throughout the crisis. The successful repossession of the Falkland Islands reflected new lustre on British arms and engendered a renewed sense of self-confidence in the British people.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that at 9.00 pm local time on 14 June the British Land Forces Commander, Major General Moore, accepted from the Argentine Commander in the Falkland Islands, General Menendez, the surrender of all the Argentine armed forces in East and West Falkland Islands together with their arms and equipment. Full information about British casualties was not yet available but first indications were that they had not been heavy in the final stages. Press reports that General Menendez had left for Buenos Aires appeared to be inaccurate. It was estimated that Argentine prisoners of war would number some 15,000 of which 11,000 were in Port Stanley itself and 2,000 on West Falkland. The Argentines had little tentage and food for three to four days only. British stocks of tents for prisoners had been lost when the Atlantic Conveyor was sunk. For humanitarian reasons, therefore, it would be necessary to repatriate most of the prisoners at once. A message would be sent that day to the Argentine Government to indicate that the British Government would be ready to repatriate the prisoners to the nearest suitable port in Argentina using the British ships, Canberra and Norland, provided that the Argentine Government agreed that all hostilities between the two countries were at an end and that safe conduct for the ships would be guaranteed. It was essential to make certain that a comprehensive cessation of hostilities was achieved. The Argentine Government would be told that, if they agreed to this, the Government would lift the Total Exclusion Zone and other restrictions and recommend to the other members of the European Community that economic sanctions should be ended, as a first step towards the restoration of normal relations. As an interim arrangement, as soon as Port Stanley airfield could be reopened, Mr Rex Hunt would return, with powers limited to those of civil administration; the responsibility of Commander-in-Chief would be exercised by the British military commander.

In discussion the point was made that, if the Argentine Government were reluctant to agree to a comprehensive cessation of hostilities it would be necessary to retain some Argentine prisoners of war; but conditions in the Islands were such that it would be necessary to repatriate the majority. There would be a strong demand to allow foreign journalists to visit the Islands. It would be helpful in terms of international opinion to agree to this; but conditions in the Islands might impose some delay. There would now be renewed demands on the Government to set up an inquiry into the events leading up to the Argentine invasion. It would be important for the inquiry to proceed expeditiously. Demands for an official inquiry into the Government's handling of the press during the operation should be resisted; but the Select Committee on Defence were likely to

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investigate the matter. The rightness of the decision to delay publication of the total number of casualties in the Argentine bombing raid on Bluff Cove had been demonstrated by the success of the operation against Port Stanley. By allowing the Argentine commander to believe that casualties had been much higher than they in fact were, and that the final British assault would in consequence be delayed, tactical surprise had been achieved and heavy British casualties in the final stages avoided. Press accusations that the intention to conduct operations against Darwin and Goose Green had been leaked in London were totally without foundation. There would now be international pressure on the United Kingdom to seek a diplomatic solution to the dispute with Argentina, in accordance with Resolution 502 of the United Nations Security Council. This would need to be handled firmly. That Resolution had been passed before British forces had been obliged, by Argentine failure to comply with it by a voluntary withdrawal, to repossess the Islands by force of arms.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that the Cabinet would wish to offer their warm congratulations and grateful thanks to all those in the armed forces, the merchant marine and the civilian support services who had contributed to the outstanding success of the operation to repossess the Falkland Islands, and to mourn all those who had given their lives in the conflict. Consideration should now be given to the early publication of an official despatch on the operation. She would consult the Opposition Leaders about the Falkland Islands inquiry, which should not concentrate only on the events leading up to the invasion but should cover the whole background of negotiations with Argentina since 1965. It would not be appropriate for it to be a judicial inquiry. In accepting the Lord Chancellor's congratulations, she would wish to give credit to the Secretary of State for Defence and the other Ministers in day-to-day charge, who had enjoyed the full backing of the Cabinet and the British people in carrying out their policies.

The Cabinet -

1. Warmly endorsed the Prime Minister's congratulations to the armed forces, the merchant marine and the civilian support services for the successful outcome of the operation to recover the Falkland Islands.
2. Noted that the Prime Minister would now consult the Opposition Leaders with a view to proceeding as expeditiously as possible with the proposed Falkland Islands inquiry.
3. Invited the Secretary of State for Defence to examine the possibility of early publication of an official despatch on the operation.

Cabinet Office

15 June 1982