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CC(82) 30th
Conclusions

COPY NO 79

CABINET

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

THURSDAY 27 MAY 1982

at 10.30 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 Francis Pym MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and
Commonwealth Affairs

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 Peter Walker MP
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and
Food

The Rt Hon Michael Heseltine MP
Secretary of State for the Environment

The Rt Hon George Younger MP
Secretary of State for Scotland

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

SECRET

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

THE FOLLOWING WERE ALSO PRESENT

The Rt Hon Sir Michael Havers QC MP
Attorney General (Item 1)

The Rt Hon Michael Jopling MP
Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury

SECRETARIAT

Sir Robert Armstrong
Mr P L Gregson (Item 4)
Mr D J S Hancock (Item 3)
Mr A D S Goodall (Items 1 and 3)
Mr R L L Facer (Items 1 and 3)
Mr D H J Hilary (Item 2)
Mr L J Harris (Item 2)
Mr W Moyes (Item 4)

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FALKLAND
ISLANDS

Previous
Reference:
CC(82) 29th
Conclusions,
Minute 1

1. THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE said that the regrettable loss of British ships should be seen against the heavy losses of aircraft sustained by Argentina. Over 50 Argentine combat aircraft had been shot down, and Argentina would now be suffering a shortage not only of aircraft but also - and especially - of pilots. British air defences, both the Harriers and the missiles, were performing with great effectiveness. The forward movement of ground forces on East Falkland had been affected by the need to use helicopters for search and rescue operations after the attack on HMS Coventry. The container ship Atlantic Conveyor was still afloat and the possibility of salvaging some of her cargo was being examined. Much of the equipment and stores aboard the ship was for use in the longer term, and its loss, though serious, would not affect the ability of British forces to carry forward the operation of repossessing the Islands.

THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said that the United Nations Security Council had adopted Resolution 505 requesting the Secretary General, Senor Perez de Cuellar, to undertake a renewed mission of good offices and to report to the Council within 7 days.

In discussion the point was made that the support in the United Nations of a number of New Commonwealth countries, notably Kenya, had been helpful in dispelling any impression that the industrialised countries were ranged on one side of the dispute and the less developed countries on the other. It was important for the United Kingdom's international position that British forces should move forward to repossess the Islands as quickly as possible. Despite the loss of the Atlantic Conveyor, British forces still had sufficient helicopters. There was evidence that Argentina was obtaining defence equipment from Israel and from South Africa. She must by now have virtually exhausted the stock of air-to-surface Exocet missiles with which she began the conflict, and she was trying to obtain further supplies through third countries. Concern was expressed about probably inaccurate Press reports that the Argentine Air Force was able to refuel the Super Entendard aircraft in flight. Argentina might continue with air attacks on British forces even after the Islands had been recovered. In some quarters in Parliament it was believed that British claims of numbers of Argentine aircraft shot down were exaggerated: in fact the figures were carefully checked, and were believed to be reliable. Further consideration would need to be given to the future of the former Commander of the Argentine garrison on South Georgia, Lieutenant Commander Astiz, who had refused to agree to be questioned by the French and Swedish authorities in connection with murders which he was alleged to have committed. Under the Geneva Conventions, Astiz could be kept as a prisoner of war until the end of hostilities, but the United Kingdom had no right to hand him over to France or Sweden. If he was to be kept in this country, however, special accommodation would have to be set aside for him. He would be the only prisoner so far taken who was thus detained, and it might be wiser to return him to Argentina.

The Cabinet -

Took note.

PARLIAMENTARY
AFFAIRS

Defence White
Paper

Previous
Reference:
CC(82) 19th
Conclusions,
Minute 2

2. The Cabinet were informed of the business to be taken in the House of Commons during the first week after the Spring Adjournment.

THE LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL said that the Convention was for the House of Commons to hold a two-day debate on defence policy on the basis of the annual defence White Paper after it had been considered by the Select Committee on Defence, followed by a further three days of debate, one on each of the Armed Services, in Opposition Supply time. There was no formal obligation to hold these debates, but most Members of Parliament would be expecting them to take place before the end of July. The timing was, however, complicated by the Government's decision to postpone the publication of the 1982 White Paper because of the Falkland Islands dispute.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE said that it would be inappropriate to publish the White Paper at the present time. Some parts of the White Paper, which had already been printed, would be qualified in the proposed addendum, but he remained convinced that its general approach was right; in particular, the current situation in the South Atlantic had vindicated the Government's decision to put the emphasis on improved weapon systems rather than aircraft carriers, and on submarines rather than surface ships. This judgment would, however, be vigorously challenged by some of the Government's backbenchers. The White Paper would be highly controversial, and premature publication and debate could be damaging to the Government's ability to maintain a united front among their own supporters on their Falkland Islands policy.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up a short discussion, said that the Cabinet agreed that no debates on defence policy should be arranged for the time being. They would place an intolerable burden on Defence Ministers in present circumstances, and, because of the redundancies envisaged in the Defence White Paper, could have an unfortunate presentational impact. The timing of the publication of the White Paper and any subsequent debates should be kept under review.

The Cabinet -

Invited the Secretary of State for Defence, in consultation with the Lord President of the Council, to keep the timing of the publication of the 1982 Defence White Paper and any associated debates under review, and to report further in due course.

FOREIGN
AFFAIRS

Iran-Iraq

Previous
Reference:
CC(82) 26th
Conclusions,
Minute 2

3. THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said Khorramshar had now been retaken by Iranian forces; it was not clear how the Iran-Iraq conflict would now develop.

The Cabinet -

Took note.

INDUSTRIAL
AFFAIRS

Industrial
Action in the
National
Health Service

Previous
Reference:
CC(82) 19th
Conclusions,
Minute 5

4. THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SOCIAL SERVICES said that the vast majority of nurses had continued to work normally during the one-day strike in the National Health Service (NHS) on 19 May. Emergency cover had not, however, been maintained everywhere, despite the undertaking from the trades unions. Further one-day strikes were planned for 4 and 8 June. The Civil Contingencies Unit was already considering the steps that might be taken to deal with any lack of emergency cover on those two days. If settlements in the NHS were eventually to be reached at about the level of the offers which had been made, it was essential that NHS management and the Government should be seen to be entirely united. The Government's handling of the NHS pay negotiations had been criticised by a number of Regional Chairmen, and in particular by the Chairman of the North Western Region, who had also publicly criticised the recent reorganisation of the NHS. The appointments of the Regional Chairmen expired at the end of July, and he would shortly be putting proposals to the Prime Minister on replacements and reappointments. In order to forestall further public criticism by the Chairmen he proposed to let it be known at an early date that the appointment of the Chairman of the North Western Region would not be renewed.

The Cabinet -

Took note.

Cabinet Office

1 June 1982