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NOTE D'ACTUALITE 11 MAY 1982

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CPL/DISCOM/109/82



10 May 1982

ANGLO-ARGENTINE CONFLICT

AN INTERVIEW WITH M. CLAUDE CHEYSSON, MINISTER FOR EXTERNAL RELATIONS, ON BBC 4  
(10 MAY 1982)

Q. - In exchange for French support over the Falklands, will the French demand that Britain gives up its opposition to the current European budget ?

THE MINISTER - I find it almost indecent to think there could be a link between the two. In one case - talking to an Englishman, I'm sorry to use strong words - it's an accounting exercise of a very limited size. In the other case, the former one, it's a question of principle. There was an aggression by the Argentinians, there was a decision by the Security Council, Britain defends that decision, Britain defends international law, we support it. It's nothing to do, nothing to do, with accounting exercises or disputes we may have elsewhere.

Q. - If there's no settlement of the Falklands crisis by the time the existing agreement on sanctions runs out, will France be prepared to support the continuation of sanctions ?

THE MINISTER - I will not consider the hypothesis that there be no settlement. All the efforts of your Government - they have been stated and we see the facts - mean that there should be a settlement before. Anyway there will be new developments before. Suppose there is no settlement, and I hate this idea, you can't imagine that things will have stood where they are. So we shall see at the end of the week. But our solidarity has been clear, abruptly stated from the very first minute. We had to speak first because we were on the Security Council, we think we have some authority out there, and we used it, as you know, from the very first moment, even before the Community could consider it.

Q. - Did it surprise you that the fighting has escalated to the level it has ?

THE MINISTER - Not so much. It's a difficult answer to give, because it will not surprise me if it did escalate again. I wonder whether the members of the Junta are in a position now to make any decision.

Q. - You mean that they're locked into what they have started doing and there is no means, no mechanism for them to retreat ?

THE MINISTER - Totalitarian régimes have their... logics.

.../.



Q. - Is there a limit to the escalation beyond which France would not find it possible to continue supporting Britain ?

THE MINISTER - I cannot answer that question. I think that as long as resolution 502 has not been implemented, we are behind Britain, we are behind those who support that resolution. If tomorrow Britain, in a fit of I can't imagine what, contrary to its history, to its tradition, were going into extraordinary other ventures, then of course we would not support it. But I can't imagine that.

Q. - Have you made a review of policy, and I'm thinking that it was a French missile and a French plane... Now it could very well have been English material, because many countries have sold arms to the Argentines. But has it made you think again about the wisdom of supplying arms to dictatorial régimes ?

THE MINISTER - Yes, It could have been, as you said, an English manufactured missile or an English trained crew. I read in the press that an Argentinian destroyer had been on training in Britain not long ago. So the question is not directly related to the Falklands but to armaments policy. As long as there is no disarmament, we feel we shall be present on this market. If we had not provided this missile to Argentina, someone else would have provided it. Now you may say the French equipment is better than others! But still the missile would have been provided by someone.

Q. - So you're looking at it really from purely commercial considerations : that there's a market there, and that French manufacturers should be in it?

THE MINISTER - There is that, there is the problem of employment at home, and finally the problem of our independence in military terms. Independence means that we must keep abreast with the most powerful in terms of modernization of our production. And this we cannot do on the sole basis of our market.

Q. - President Mitterrand said last week that France reserved the position to bring its influence to bear when the time was right, hinting, it seemed to me, at a possible European initiative. Is the time approaching when something like that might be done ?

THE MINISTER - Ask London. We stand with London, it's London that will say when and how friends, brothers, can be helpful.

Q. - But France is not considering doing anything off its own bat, without previous consultation with London ?

THE MINISTER - We're no masters of peace, of telling people how they should behave./.