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10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

18 May 1982

Dear Michael,

Thank you for your letter of 17 May urging me to agree now to present to the House of Commons any terms for a settlement of the Falklands dispute which may emerge from the discussions the United Nations Secretary General is holding in New York, before the Government takes any decision to embark upon a major military escalation.

I have considered your letter very carefully but I cannot give you the assurance you seek. As I explained to you in the House of Commons on Tuesday and Thursday of last week, it is for the Government to take the necessary decisions and then to answer to the House for its actions.

I do not think that I can put the Government's position more clearly than I did last Thursday (Hansard of 13 May, volume 23, no. 115, col. 943) "If there is a settlement, the Government would come afterwards to report to the House and would be answerable for the settlement that they had agreed. Equally, if there is not a settlement the power of action resides in the Government ... and we are answerable to the House for our actions."

/ The Government

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The Government is doing all it can to secure a negotiated solution to the Falklands dispute. Sir Anthony Parsons, our Ambassador to the United Nations, came back to this country at the weekend for consultations and he has now returned to New York with instructions to continue his efforts with the United Nations Secretary General to try to reach a negotiated settlement. If we can secure such an agreement on terms which the Government believes are right, we will accept it and then seek the approval of the House of Commons. If we cannot reach agreement on terms which we regard as acceptable, then as Government we will have to decide what further military action to take. We will answer for our decisions to the House.

The Government has been ready throughout the Falklands crisis to come to the House to report the latest position. I think that it would be timely if we had another debate later this week, and we shall be in touch through the usual channels to settle the day.

Yours sincerely

Raymond Mackenzie

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The Rt. Hon. Michael Foot, M.P.