

LOBBY BRIEFING

time: 5.15 PM date: 16.4.82

The Prime Minister had gone to Chequers and was expected to stay there till Sunday. We had no news of Mr Haig - either his next visit here or a joint statement from Buenos Aires.

The Prime Minister had not stayed in London last night because of her MoD briefing. There had been no direct contact between the Prime Minister and Haig or Reagan. We said we were not spoiling for a fight; we sought a peaceful settlement and would do all we could to achieve one. We had no comment on the Anderson tape but we said we would be surprised if Haig had gone away thinking we were seeking a skirmish. We had been reasonable for 17 years; we were flexible on the future of the Falklands, subject to their wishes but we could not be flexible about the UN resolution. On flexibility over Argentine withdrawal we said there had been no indication that they would withdraw. If the fleet turned round the Argentines would be left in situ with no counter.

The Prime Minister had not called Pym and Nott to Chequers this weekend; she would be in contact as necessary. On Reagan's attitude we said we would not publicly criticise the US while Haig was doing his utmost to achieve a peaceful settlement; he was entitled to judge what his best negotiating position would be. Haig's position was at stake; if he failed the US could be expected to be on the side of democracy. He had to be left free to operate without criticism. We were not happy with Mrs Kirkpatrick.

We refused to give details of discussions or reveal our strategy; we would not weaken our position. Asked if we expected Haig to eventually stop being even-handed we said we must wait and see. We agreed that a one-sided mediator would lose credibility with the other side. We could not say if we thought talks could continue once the fleet was in situ. The longer the situation continued the more crucial each round of talks became.

On UN moves we said there was no guarantee that the Russians would not veto any further resolutions.

On the Anderson tape we said we did not know if the story was authentic; if it was, it was a bad reflection on so-called open government and was most unhelpful to Mr Haig. It did show however that he had the support of the President.

On possible consequences for Argentina if Galtieri fell, we said they had had riots before the invasion. We were not worried about saving his face. There were other ramifications than just the Falklands.

On FCO information we said we thought the inquiry would vindicate Lord Carrington, who happened to be in post when the balloon went up after 17 years. The inquest would not be held until the immediate problem was solved. The Argentinians had not decided to invade until the last moment; even if the signs had been read the UK would still not have its fleet there by now.

We had no further news on Argentinian ship movements; there was still no evidence of anything in the 200 mile zone.

We did not know if Haig would return but there was a feeling that he would do so - he might well go via Washington if he did. We agreed there was still a very big economic sanction to be applied by the USA if other means failed. The EC action underlined the political resolve of the Community; the old Commonwealth had also joined in. The EC action did not undermine our resolve on the mandate; the system was inherently unfair.

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On Doug Hoyle's questions on arms sales we said Mr Nott would have to answer; but of the past six weeks a month had been pre-invasion.

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