

PRIME MINISTER'S DAY

The Prime Minister is working at No 10 all day and will probably be in the House for the Statement on the Falkland Islands.

At 9.00am she chaired a meeting of the Group of Ministers concerned with the Falkland Islands (Foreign Secretary, Home Sec., S/S Defence, Attorney General, Chancellor of the Duchy, CDS).

CABINET

At 11.45 the Prime Minister will chair a meeting of the Cabinet. (Ended 1.35)

IN THE HOUSE STATEMENTS

At 3.30pm a Statement will be made on the Falkland Islands, probably by Mr Nott. We also indicated that a Statement by Mr Pym had been suggested. It was possible that, with FCO top for Questions, the opportunity would be taken to cover the necessary points.

ANSWERS OF INTEREST

No 74 Written 3.30pm: Mr Michael Brotherton to ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the Review of Rail Finances. (Answer will name the members of the review committee and give the terms of reference).

MAFF

By agreement between the Parties the expected Statement on the EC Council will now be dealt with in a written Answer.

MOD BRIEFING

As of now we thought it unlikely that MoD would have anything to say at midday or in advance of Mr Nott's Statement.

DIPLOMATIC MOVES

There were two focuses. Peru had put forward ideas through the US which we had considered yesterday. A constructive reply had been sent last night to Haig and further exchanges were continuing. The second area was in the UN. The Secretary General was engaged in a procedural diplomatic effort. When Mr Pym was in New York at the weekend, the Secretary General had put forward ideas to the Foreign Secretary. These were being considered. The UN might have suggested a deadline whereas we did not recognise one.

Our constructive response did not necessarily mean acceptance. The Peruvian ideas were a combination of building on, and a refinement of, the earlier US ideas. As Mr Pym had said in the House yesterday, we were concerned with the implementation of Resolution 502 and principally the withdrawal of Argentine troops. This would be followed by negotiations on the long-term solution. As with the earlier American proposals, we acknowledged that the Peruvian initiative covered withdrawal, interim administration and procedures leading to long-term negotiations.

Our method of communication with Lima in respect of the Peruvian initiative was through Haig although we did of course have our Embassy in Lima which was also in touch with the Peruvian Government. We noted that there were two Argentine military forces in Lima at this time.

offices

LOBBY BRIEFING

2.

time: 11.00 date: 5.5.82

We were not prepared to make any judgement on which of the two initiatives was most likely to lead to a successful conclusion. On Latin American mediation, we said that we would have to look carefully at such a proposal; but as things stood, the Americans were working very closely with the Peruvians.

We had no information to support rumours that there had been a major naval battle overnight. We had no knowledge of a second British ship having been hit.

CABINET

The decision to hold a Cabinet today was taken at this morning's meeting of Ministers. They would be considering both the military and diplomatic positions.

CEASEFIRE

Pressed on whether we would be prepared to agree to a ceasefire, we stressed that the immediate requirement was for the Argentine forces to withdraw. This was not just a British requirement but was called for by UNR502.

MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

The Prime Minister was deeply concerned by the news of HMS Sheffield. She had said she dreaded having to inform the House that some of our ships had been sunk. Her thoughts were very much with the families of the men on board and in particular those families whose relatives might have been killed or injured. Nevertheless the Government's resolve was unimpaired.

PROSPECTS

Asked if prospects were better now than 24 hours ago, we said that perhaps some progress was being made; certainly on the diplomatic front there was enormous work and effort. But we did not wish to build up hopes.

WORLD OPINION

Clearly there were two elements, namely the sinking of the Belgrano and the attack on the Sheffield. The latter attack obviously put in perspective our torpedoing of the Belgrano which was necessary in order to protect our forces.

Our fundamental position had not changed as a result of events. We required nothing less than implementation of UNR502. Invaders/aggressors must be stopped.

REAGAN

There was a considerable amount of traffic between London and Washington but the Prime Minister had not spoken on the telephone to Reagan.

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which has direct responsibility for these matters—I am sure that he would find that either the chairman or I would be helpful if we could be.

Mr. Stoddart: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, as well as creating over 5,000 redundancies at Shildon, Norwich and Swindon, British Railways Board also intend to put into mothballs the apprentice training school at Swindon? Does he agree that this would be a disgraceful waste of excellent training facilities, and will he give me an assurance that he will do everything possible to make use of these facilities instead of closing them?

Mr. Tebbit: I am sure that the chances of making good use of such facilities would be enormously increased if the staff of British Rail were willing to make full and proper use of the capital investment made in British Rail, and get on with increasing productivity and moving on to better and more flexible ways of working.

Mr. John Grant: Will the Secretary of State accept that the MSC report excludes any element of compulsion for the youth training scheme? Will he accept that so that we can have the maximum of speed and the maximum of support both throughout the industry and the House?

Mr. Tebbit: There has never been any proposal for any compulsion in this regard.

Mr. Stott: Should not the Secretary of State for Employment have been better briefed before coming to the Dispatch Box to reply to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Stoddart)? The workers in British Rail Engineering have contributed magnificently to productivity agreements, and over the past 10 years their record has been faultless.

Mr. Tebbit: I am sure that great strides have been made in increasing productivity in the engineering works. However, the engineering works do not exist in their own right, but as a support for running the railway. There is clearly a pressing need for greater productivity on that railway.

Training Boards

16. **Mr. Hooley** asked the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total number of staff of industrial training boards, of all grades, made redundant up to 30 March 1982 on account of the winding up of 16 of the boards.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Between 16 November 1981 and 30 March 1982, 424 ITB staff had been made redundant as a result of the proposed winding-up of 16 industrial training boards.

Mr. Hooley: What evidence does the Minister have that the work of these people is being replaced in any way by individual employers in private industry?

Mr. Morrison: The majority of employers' organisations have come forward with voluntary proposals on a satisfactory basis. When the orders are laid before the House it will have an opportunity to debate them.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that the training that took place within industry was largely carried out by the companies themselves, and that, in later years, the training boards had become a bureaucracy monitoring that training?

Mr. Morrison: I agree that training in industry has been almost completely carried out by industry itself and that the boards concerned were monitoring that training. In some cases, at least, they had become rather over-bureaucratic.

Mr. Harold Walker: The Minister will recall that last week, before the Select Committee, his right hon. Friend gave an undertaking to supply the Select Committee with information about the voluntary arrangements that were replacing the boards to be wound up, but refused to give an undertaking that that information will be made available to the House before we debate the winding-up of the boards? Will the Minister think again about that and recognise the importance of the House having the fullest information before it reaches this crucially important decision?

Mr. Morrison: I recall that my right hon. Friend made clear last week before the Select Committee that he would provide the information to the Select Committee. He will also inform the House of the progress being made towards voluntary training arrangements.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Gwilym Roberts** asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 May.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others, including one with the right hon. Gentlemen the Members for Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles (Mr. Steel) and for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen). In addition to my duties in the House I shall have further meetings later today.

Mr. Roberts: In view of the terrible loss of life in the South Atlantic, and the rapidly escalating military confrontation, will the Prime Minister make a further effort today to reach a peaceful solution to the situation, involving probably the United Nations?

The Prime Minister: We all regret the loss of human life in the South Atlantic, but our first duty is to protect, and to minimise the danger to, our own forces in the South Atlantic, who are there because we all agreed that we should send a task force—

Mr. Cryer: I did not, so do not start dragging me into your rotten schemes.

Mr. Foulkes: I did not.

The Prime Minister:—because we all agreed that we must stop the invader, and because the vast majority of people in this House recognise that the best way to stop the trouble is to withdraw the forces from the Falkland Islands. Of course, the effort to seek a peaceful solution continues, and will continue vigorously. My right hon. Friend the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary will be reporting later on his visit to the United Nations. We shall pursue a peaceful settlement either there or through other means.

Sir Peter Emery: Will my right hon. Friend say over and over again that until the Argentine Government

withdraw their troops from the Falkland Islands, every injury and fatality in the southern Atlantic is absolutely due to the action of the Argentine junta?

The Prime Minister: Yes, it was the Argentines who broke the peace with unprovoked aggression. They are on British sovereign territory and there are British people under the heel of the junta. We sent the task force to rectify that situation. We hope to do so by all peaceful means and shall continue to try to do so. In the meantime, our first duty must be to protect our boys.

Mr. Foot: May I press the right hon. Lady on the question of the sinking of the cruiser and the tragic loss of life involved. We are all deeply concerned about it, just as we all are deeply aware that the origin of the crisis was the aggression by the Argentine. None the less, the Government have direct responsibilities in this matter, and the right hon. Lady especially so. Can she tell us what political control there was over this development, which was a major development? Can she say what calculations about the minimum use of force entered into those considerations?

Returning to the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock (Mr. Roberts) can she tell us exactly what are the next steps that will be taken by the Government to try to deal with the situation? There is always the danger that such an event as the sinking of the ship will recur, and that it can put our Service men in danger. We on the Labour side of the House are as determined to protect them as anybody in the country.

The Prime Minister: I wholly share the right hon. Gentleman's view that we must protect the lives of our own Service men, whose great skill and courage we applaud and admire. With regard to that particular event, and all events other than the mere tactical ones in the South Atlantic, the task force clearly is and was under political control. I want to make it perfectly clear that after the announcement of the maritime exclusion zone—I referred to the matter in the House last week—there was another announcement on 23 April, which was communicated to the Argentine Government and also to the United Nations. It may help if I read it in full:

"In announcing the establishment of a maritime exclusion zone around the Falkland Islands, Her Majesty's Government made it clear that this measure was without prejudice to the right of the United Kingdom to take whatever additional measures may be needed in the exercise of its right of self-defence under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. In this connection, Her Majesty's Government now wishes to make clear that any approach on the part of Argentine warships, including submarines, naval auxiliaries, or military aircraft which could amount to a threat to interfere with the mission of the British forces in the South Atlantic will encounter the appropriate response".

The warning was given to the Argentine Government, I repeat, on 23 April. It was reported to the United Nations on 24 April.

Mr. Foot: All of us can understand the documents that have been put in the Library on this matter, but the right hon. Lady has not fully explained why such a development as this occurred in the circumstances in which it did occur, nor has she explained why the maximum amount—or, at any rate, a considerable amount—of force was used to carry it out. None of these things has been explained. They will need to be explained much more fully to the country and to others. Does the right hon. Lady appreciate that these are important matters for our own Service men,

whom we wish to protect as much as anyone? They are also important for the support that this Government may command throughout the world in these matters. If the right hon. Lady and the Government do not appreciate that the sinking of the cruiser raises great questions of this kind, she does not understand the situation.

The Prime Minister: May I make it perfectly clear that the worry that I live with hourly is that attacking Argentine forces either naval or air, may get through to ours and sink some of our ships. I am sure that that will also be in the right hon. Gentleman's mind. There was clear aggressive intent on the part of the Argentine fleet and Government. It could be seen first in their claims. They previously claimed that they had sunk HMS "Exeter", that they had damaged HMS "Hermes", leaving it inoperative and badly damaged, and that they had brought down 11 Harriers. That was clear evidence of Argentine aggressive intent. The right hon. Gentleman may also remember the persistent attacks throughout the whole of Saturday on our task force, which were repelled only by the supreme skill and courage of our people. He may also know, or will hear from my right hon. Friend, of the very heavy armaments that the cruiser carried, and, of course, the cruiser was accompanied by two destroyers, which were not attacked in any way.

Mr. Mates: Does my right hon. Friend agree that of all the uses to which the word has been put in the last weeks, the word "paramount" applies most of all now to the safety and lives of our Service men in the south Atlantic? Will she further agree that the House of Commons, having agreed to send the task force to back up our diplomacy, cannot now flinch from the consequences that may occur, however serious they are?

The Prime Minister: I wholly agree with my hon. Friend. Our first duty is to our own forces, who are there on our orders and with our support. We must look after their safety. Our second duty is to see that we try to use minimum force. However, that cruiser and the associated destroyers—and, of course, there are other task forces of the Argentine navy also at large in the south Atlantic, not far from the exclusion zone—posed a very obvious threat to the men in our task force. Had we left it any later, it would have been too late, and I might have had to come to the House with the news that some of our ships had been sunk.

Falkland Islands

Q2. Mr. Dalyell asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the Falkland Islands.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and for Defence will be making full statements after questions on recent diplomatic and military developments respectively.

Mr. Dalyell: When the Prime Minister referred to political control, did she herself, personally and explicitly, authorise the firing of the torpedoes on the "General Belgrano"?

The Prime Minister: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the task force is and was under full political control.

Sir John Biggs-Davison: Would not some of the ignorant and irresponsible questions coming from the

Opposition have been avoided if the Leader of the Opposition had done his duty to his party, to the country, and as a Privy Councillor, by availing himself of the invitation from my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to acquaint him with matters with which we, who are not sworn of the Privy Council, do not wish to have access because we have confidence in her handling of this affair and in Her Majesty's Forces?

The Prime Minister: It is for the right hon. Gentleman to say whether he will avail himself of any offer to talk on Privy Councillor terms.

Mr. William Hamilton: No.

The Prime Minister: It is for the right hon. Gentleman to decide whether or not he will avail himself of the invitation.

Mr. Hamilton: It is for us, too.

The Prime Minister: Apart from that, it may concern right hon. and hon. Gentlemen on that side. He did not wish to do so. In the meantime, I beg him to have some regard for the practical considerations that affect our operations in the south Atlantic.

Mr. Foot: Would the right hon. Lady care to read to the House what she said about the matter of consultations on "Panorama" a few days ago? Will she also repeat to the House what I think she understood well before, the attitude that has been taken by many Opposition leaders in previous times, who thought that they would be failing in their duty to the House of Commons to gag themselves? If the leader of the Liberal Party wants to do it, he is perfectly entitled to do so. I would be very happy if the right hon. Lady would read to the House and country her own words on this subject.

The Prime Minister: I do not quarrel with the right hon. Gentleman's decision in any way. I made an offer available to him on the same basis as I did to the right hon. Gentleman the leader of the Liberal Party and to the leader of the SDP in this House. Whether or not he takes it up is a matter for him. I have been in a similar position. There have been times when I have taken the offer up and times when I have not.

Sir Anthony Kershaw: On the subject of the cruiser, how can anyone maintain that such a ship, armed in that way, and accompanied by those destroyers, was not a threat to our forces? Will my right hon. Friend also bear in mind that the first communiqué about the sinking from

the Argentine side said that the ship was all right, except for damage to its steering? If that were true, does it not show that minimum force was then used?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. The cruiser posed a real threat to our forces then, and would have continued to do so in the coming days.

Mr. Grimond: In view of these events in the south Atlantic, has not the time now come for a fresh, direct approach by Her Majesty's Government to the junta proposing that the Argentines evacuate the Falkland Islands, so that negotiations can then be entered into directly between us? After all, we are still not at war with the Argentine.

The Prime Minister: At the moment we prefer to make our approaches through a third party. Mr. Haig did valiant work, and it is clear that he is still interested in trying to bring about a solution, both through his own efforts and, as the right hon. Gentleman may have read, through certain initiatives that are being undertaken by Mr. Haig through the Peruvian Government, and which we are pursuing vigorously. We have not gone through the junta itself. It is not easy to see with whom one would be negotiating, whether it would be the president, other members of the junta or the generals behind it. Throughout, that has been a very difficult problem.

Engagements

Q3. Mr. Brinton asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Brinton: Is my right hon. Friend aware that she still has massive support for her Government's policies on the Falkland Islands? Is my right hon. Friend also aware that there are two former colonies in the world today with populations of fewer than 8,000 and about 20 countries which have less land area than the Falkland Islands? Will she ensure that Britain does not deviate in its determination to demonstrate that armed, unprovoked aggression must never pay?

The Prime Minister: I believe that what my hon. Friend says about there being small countries in the Commonwealth and countries with smaller areas than the Falkland Islands is correct. I entirely agree that unless Britain manages to stop and undo the Argentine aggression, many other small countries and territories will go in fear that they may suffer the same fate.

Falkland Islands

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Francis Pym): Since we debated the Falklands crisis last Thursday, there have been some important military developments. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will report on those in a few minutes. Meanwhile, I wish to pay tribute to the efficiency and courage of our forces. Our relief that British lives have not been lost is inevitably tempered by our deep regret at Argentine casualties. I know that the whole House would wish to be associated with these sentiments.

These military achievements have been in support of our overall strategy; they have not been and will not become a substitute for it. As the House knows, we are maintaining the maximum pressure on Argentina in the diplomatic, economic and military fields with the objective of securing Argentine withdrawal at the earliest possible moment and in compliance with the mandatory resolution of the United Nations Security Council.

The military pressure that we have exercised has been challenged despite our clear warnings and our desire to use the minimum force. Our response in the circumstances was as inevitable as it was right. However, I can assure the House that what we are seeking is not the military humiliation of Argentina but a victory for the rule of law in international affairs.

Since the House last met, I have visited Washington and New York to reinforce our diplomatic efforts to achieve a negotiated settlement as soon as possible. I had extensive talks with Secretary Haig. These covered the diplomatic, economic and military dimensions of the crisis.

On the diplomatic side, Mr. Haig made it clear that, just as we have not abandoned our diplomatic endeavours following Argentina's rejection of the earlier American proposals, nor has he. We discussed a range of ideas for a settlement. We are continuing our work with all urgency. As the House will be aware, other Governments have also been active in promoting a settlement. We welcome this and are in close touch with them. Therefore, we are working actively on various ideas, including those put forward by the President of Peru. I can assure the House that we are losing no time in developing our thoughts about them and communicating our constructive views to those concerned. The framework for a settlement remains as I have outlined it to the House.

Proposals are needed which cover the essential elements of resolution 502—withdrawal, and negotiations on the future, unprejudiced in any way. They must also address the interim arrangements and guarantees required.

On the economic front, Mr. Haig described the measures which the United States has recently announced. They are a tangible sign of American support for our cause. I know that the Americans have not closed their mind to additional steps.

On the military front, Mr. Haig and Mr. Weinberger confirmed that they are ready to provide material support for our forces and I welcomed this. We are following it up in detail and urgently.

In New York I discussed diplomatic possibilities with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and with the President of the Security Council. I made it clear to them

that our immediate concern is the implementation of resolution 502, and that we are open to any ideas which would achieve this on a satisfactory basis, namely, an Argentine withdrawal followed by negotiations on the long-term solution without prejudice to basic principles.

We were able to consider together the various possible ways of involving the United Nations. We recognised that a solution will require not only the right ideas but the right timing and the right sequence of events. I know that the Secretary-General is in touch with the Argentine Government. The burden of compliance with what has already been decided, of course, rests squarely with them.

It must not be forgotten that we remain the victims of a totally unprovoked act of aggression in defiance of the United Nations charter. We are seeking to ensure that Argentina does not profit from aggression and to uphold the rule of law in international affairs. That is an interest which all members of the United Nations must share.

Our resolve should not be doubted, nor should our readiness to talk and our will for peace.

Mr. Denis Healey (Leeds, East): I shall not be drawn into discussing now the military operations of the weekend as the Secretary of State for Defence is about to make a statement on them, except to join the Foreign Secretary in paying tribute to the courage and efficiency shown by our forces.

I remind the right hon. Gentleman that Mr. Haig, in announcing the shift in American policy on Friday, said that

"a purely military outcome cannot endure over time. There will have to be a negotiated solution. Otherwise we will all face unending hostility and insecurity in the South Atlantic."

I hope that Her Majesty's Government share those views, because they are shared unanimously by Labour Members.

There is deep concern among Labour Members and many of our allies in case certain types of military action—the attack on the cruiser "General Belgrano" may be such an instance—intended, as the Foreign Secretary said, to back up negotiations, may weaken or even destroy the possibility of negotiations for a long-term solution. He must be aware from telegrams that have been received in the Foreign Office this morning that the operations of the last few days have already cost us a great deal of support among our European allies.

On Friday Mr. Haig said that he had reason to hope that the United Kingdom would consider a settlement along the lines of his proposals. We understand from newspaper reports that Mr. Haig's proposals were put again, although perhaps in a modified form, by the Peruvian Government in the past two days.

Has not the time now come when the Foreign Secretary should tell us a little bit about those proposals as it is the Argentine failure to accede them which has led to the military action over the past few days and the shift in American policy? The House has the right to that information at this time because it is now being made available to Governments in many other parts of the world.

Finally, may I ask the Foreign Secretary about his visit to the United Nations? I understand from newspaper reports that the Common Market Commission will put to the Council of Ministers this week the proposal that the continuing support of the Common Market for the British position over the Falkland Islands should depend on our asking the Secretary-General of the United Nations to provide his good offices. The Foreign Secretary will be aware that the Argentine Foreign Minister, at a meeting

last Friday, invited the Secretary-General to give his good offices. He will know that the Secretary-General is able to do so if we, as the other party to the dispute, ask him to do so. Has the Foreign Secretary asked Mr. Costa Mendez to take over the role of intermediary—[*Interruption.*] I am sorry; we all make mistakes of that nature, as did the Prime Minister a moment ago in Question Time. Has the right hon. Gentleman asked the United Nations Secretary-General to take over the role of intermediary at this time? If he has not, why not?

Over the weekend the Foreign Secretary said that it was Her Majesty's Government's intention to secure the withdrawal of Argentine forces by negotiation. The Government refuse to negotiate directly with the Argentine Government so long as Argentine troops are still on the Falkland Islands. If they are not prepared to negotiate directly, will they ask the United Nations to take over the role of intermediary?

I hope that there is no truth in the newspaper reports of the past two days that the only reason why the right hon. Gentleman visited the United Nations this weekend was to appease opinion in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. We believe that the time has come when the United Nations must play the central role in securing the withdrawal of Argentine troops from the Falkland Islands and that it will have a very important role in implementing the ultimate settlement.

Mr. Pym: The right hon. Gentleman is less than fair when he suggests that what I have done during this weekend and in previous weeks is anything other than to do everything that I conceivably can to bring about "a negotiated settlement as soon as possible", the words that I used in my statement. We do not yet know whether that can be achieved, but I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that in the end, whenever that is, there must be a negotiated settlement. The sooner that it comes, the better it will be. That is what my expedition was intended to try to further.

I assure the right hon. Gentleman that the Secretary-General is in touch with the Argentine Government and is talking with them in the same way that he is talking with me. He did not describe himself as an intermediary, but, as he is in touch with both Governments, I suppose that one could describe that as his position. I have had many talks with him about the various possibilities, but the essential point remains that the Argentines are already under a mandatory obligation to withdraw. One problem that the United Nations faces is how to ensure that that withdrawal is carried out. That must be a precondition for taking matters further. The other essential condition is that the Argentines must come off their hook of saying that the outcome of the negotiations should be predetermined in favour of Argentina. That clearly cannot be acceptable. It may be that the Argentines will move from both those positions, in which case we may make a real advance.

I visited not only the United Nations but Mr. Haig to explore all those matters. Although the United Nations is a possible forum and can help in many ways, there are other possibilities, and I referred in my statement to the work that is going on, based on ideas that originated with Peru. The original American proposals were rejected last week by the Argentines. We are now working on a new series of proposals. I shall make a constructive input to those proposals and I am already doing so. They are different in character, but they cover the same area that I

mentioned in last week's debate—withdrawal, what happens in the interim, and the final negotiations. Whatever detail is discussed, it must cover those areas. That is what we are pursuing actively, constructively and positively, as I am sure the House wishes.

That is the present position. It is difficult in the United Nations at the moment for the simple reason that the mandatory resolution has not been fulfilled by the Argentines. The right hon. Gentleman is right in intimating that one member of the European Community raised a matter with the president of the Security Council today. There may be a meeting, but I do not yet know what specific proposal will be put to the Security Council. That is perhaps not as important as the search for the means by which we can achieve a negotiated settlement.

Another matter on which I must comment, although my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will come to it in a moment, is the military action, which is essentially directed to securing the total exclusion zone of which we gave due notice. We declared a maritime exclusion zone, to which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister referred, which was subsequently extended. The action that has been taken so far is wholly in accordance with the principles that we outlined and the warnings that we gave in advance.

Mr. Healey: The Foreign Secretary has made two important statements. First, he said that he believed that the word "intermediary" might be appropriate to describe the function that is now being carried out by the United Nations Secretary-General. Secondly—I am surprised that he did not tell the House this in his original statement—he said that a member of the European Community was already in touch with the United Nations Secretary-General with a view to calling a meeting of the Security Council.

The Foreign Secretary will be well aware that there is a defined procedure at the United Nations under which the Secretary-General can operate a good offices role, either personally or by appointing an individual or individuals, in order to bring hostile parties together to solve a problem. In the light of the information that the Foreign Secretary gave us about another possible meeting of the Security Council, it is now very urgent, in the interests of the United Kingdom, that the Argentine Foreign Minister having already asked the Secretary-General to assume that role, we should do the same now so that no time is lost and the future is not prejudiced, as I warned the right hon. Gentleman in our debate last week it might be, by a decision of the Security Council which might be much more hostile to our interests than the present one.

Mr. Pym: The Security Council has already passed resolution 502, which requires the Argentines to withdraw. That is the basic position. British sovereign territory has been invaded and, during the past three weeks, the Argentine forces have been heavily reinforced. Clearly the first move must be an Argentine withdrawal from that territory. The Secretary-General is in touch with the Argentine Government, as I made clear in my statement, and one of his objectives is to ensure that resolution 502 is implemented.

As to the right hon. Gentleman's second point, I have had no direct communication from any member of the European Community. However, it is on the tapes and it has been made public knowledge that one member has

[Mr. Pym]

taken certain action. I shall comment upon that and react to it when I hear from the member State what it intends. However, not only the Secretary-General but the President of the Security Council had consultations throughout yesterday—no doubt they continued today—with all the members of the Security Council. Therefore, the United Nations' work on this important crisis is very active.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I propose to allow 20 minutes for questions on this statement, as I have allowed on previous statements. Another statement is to follow.

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the vast majority of the British public are behind the Government in their resolution against the naked aggression of the Argentines? Is it not regrettable that the right hon. Members for Bristol, South-East (Mr. Benn) and for Lanark (Dame Judith Hart) have recently made statements that have been used by the Argentine Government as propaganda to hoodwink the Argentine people? Is it not a disgrace that two Privy Councillors should make statements that can be used by the Argentine Government and that could extend hostilities and jeopardise British lives?

Mr. Pym: A number of right hon. and hon. Members would agree with my hon. Friend's remarks. The propaganda and the information put out by Argentina has been proved to be extremely inaccurate in many important respects—indeed deliberately misleading, no doubt for its own purposes. During my visit to America I gave an assurance that what we put out from our forces would be accurate and true. The Argentine junta is carrying on a misleading campaign of propaganda such as we have seen before which in the end does the country no good. However, it will be helpful if we speak with the greatest unity that we can possibly achieve.

Dame Judith Hart (Lanark): In view of the Foreign Secretary's remark that there must be negotiation, does he agree that it would be helpful in that negotiation if there was now a truce on both sides so that the matter could now go to the United Nations without further loss of life?

Mr. Pym: There can be a truce, but Argentina must withdraw and there must be no prejudgment of the ultimate outcome of the negotiations in the longer term.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): May I associate the SDP with the expressions of regret at the loss of life of the Argentinian Service men and also pay tribute to the courage and skill of the British Service men who have been operating in very difficult circumstances?

Will the Foreign Secretary say a little more about the initiative taken by the President of Peru? Is not Peru uniquely well placed to act in that way, as a friend of the Argentine and with close relations with the United States and friendly relations with Britain—quite apart from its association with the Secretary-General of the United Nations? What does the right hon. Gentleman intend to do about taking up that initiative? Is he ready to negotiate without precondition, and would such negotiations include the acceptance of a readiness to talk about the trusteeship council provision?

Mr. Pym: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his opening remarks. The President of Peru formulated

a series of proposals which he communicated to the United States and directly to the Argentines, who turned them down. With Mr. Haig, I am responding positively to the ideas contained in the proposal and I will communicate some ideas of my own which may lead to a possible basis. I should not like to raise undue hopes, but I will do everything that I can.

The right hon. Gentleman spoke of negotiations without preconditions, but there must be the precondition of the withdrawal of Argentine forces, who have no right to be in the Falkland Islands and no prejudice to the ultimate negotiations. Then we could start talking. In the longer term, I hope sooner rather than later, when we sit round the table to discuss the longer-term solution there will be a range of possibilities that could and should be discussed. Our immediate worry and anxiety is to get into a position where we can start talking at the negotiating table.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the support that he has on the Back Benches for his untiring work in the United States to obtain a start to negotiations. Was the safety of the Falkland Islanders raised in any of his discussions? Is there any way that negotiations would provide for the temporary evacuation of the women and children of the Falkland Islands? Can my right hon. Friend give me any message for the many Falkland Islanders who now reside in my constituency?

Mr. Pym: I have had the islanders very much in my mind all the time and I appreciate the risks that they are incurring and the difficulties that they face. I have sent messages to them when I have had the opportunity to do so, and I have thought about the possibility of an evacuation. It would be difficult to arrange, but if the islanders want it and we could arrange it we would naturally provide a passage for them. However, I do not think that that would be easy now. I have thought about the possibility a great deal and have tried to involve the International Red Cross and to do whatever I can.

We must never forget that we are involved in this crisis and are taking the major steps that we are taking because of the people who live on British territory. It is for them that this started. They have been denied certain rights and the Argentines wish to impose on them a certain sort of rule which they may or may not want. We are there in the defence of those people's rights. That is why we got involved in the first place and we must never forget that.

Mr. John Morris (Averavon): Did the Secretary-General of the United Nations tell the Foreign Secretary what he had in mind about how resolution 502 could be implemented?

Mr. Pym: No, he did not. There is a very great difficulty for the United Nations over that. The Secretary-General did not put any specific suggestions to me. Naturally, in expressing and explaining the British point of view to him, I was anxious to hear what views and ideas he had. He had a number and we discussed them, but there was nothing specific. Similarly, the President of the Security Council had no specific proposal to put before me immediately, but we explored the area together and that was useful. We are in daily touch and more often than that through our ambassador.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (Down, South): The right hon. Gentleman referred to negotiations to take place after the

repossession of the islands. Will he tell the House on what subjects it would be proper, in the Government's view, for those negotiations to take place?

Mr. Pym: The basis on which they should take place is the charter of the United Nations. As to the format, there are a number of possible ways in which it could be done; that has not yet been decided. There are a number of options and we have an open mind about them, but the most urgent requirement is to get into a position where those negotiations can take place.

Sir Bernard Braine (Essex, South-East): My right hon. Friend speaks of a readiness to negotiate, but what does he have in mind that is negotiable? Surely if the Falkland Islanders are in his mind he cannot contemplate discussions over sovereignty, which would mean the handing over of the Falkland Islanders to a State which has almost the worst human rights record in the world. Is it the Government's intention at any time to raise with the United Nations the question of investigating the disappearance of thousands of Argentines, the use of torture and behaviour that puts that country completely outside the pale of civilisation?

Mr. Pym: The sovereignty question is the heart of the issue and dispute. For years we have been negotiating about the future status of the islands.

Sir Bernard Braine: That is what is wrong.

Mr. Pym: But that is a matter of history. That is what has been happening. We are not in any doubt about our title to the Falkland Islands, and we never have been. We have been governing, administering and having a British presence on the islands for the people there and we have always taken full account of their views. The Argentines assert that they have sovereignty and they now assert that they are not prepared to negotiate about it. That is not an acceptable position.

As to the long-term future of the islands, successive British Governments have taken the view that if the people there wished to have a different sort of Government or to organise their affairs in another way the British Government would not stand in their way. We are there as trustees for those people. That is the issue. We are not prepared to enter negotiations while Argentina remains so obdurate in upholding a claim which it believes is valid but which we are confident is not valid.

Mr. Frank Hooley (Sheffield, Heeley): If the Security Council is faced with a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire, will the United Kingdom veto it?

Mr. Pym: In so far as we are engaged in military operations, we are doing so in self-defence under the United Nations charter. The way that we have done it is by declaring—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] Yes, on the conditions that I have just stated—that there is a withdrawal of forces and no prejudice to the ultimate solution. That is quite clear. In the meantime, in preserving British territory and British citizens, we have said that we will secure the total exclusion zone, and that is what we are engaged in doing.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South-West): Will my right hon. Friend lose no chance to point out that the responsibility for the tragic deaths in the South Atlantic lies fairly and squarely with President Galtieri and his

junta? Will he also point out that any negotiations would become extremely difficult if British lives were lost or British ships sunk?

Mr. Pym: The truth is—and it cannot be said too often—that the Argentines started this trouble. They invaded the islands, which they had no right to do. That was the cause of the whole trouble and that is where the blame lies. The condition for making any progress is that they withdraw. Any casualty suffered in the meantime, on whichever side, is a tragedy. That is one reason why we have a real incentive to achieve a negotiated settlement, but it requires two to do that and it is up to the Argentines to withdraw and to have no prejudice about the final settlement that may be achieved. Then we can get round the table in a civilised way and discuss the issue as it ought to be discussed.

Mr. Russell Johnston (Inverness): Is it not the case that despite the right hon. Gentleman's vigorous diplomatic efforts, on which he is to be congratulated, the essence of his statement is "no progress"? Given that fact, why has not the right hon. Gentleman maintained the closest contact possible with our Community partners to prevent, for example, action by one member with the United Nations such as he mentioned in his response to the question of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey).

Mr. Pym: It may seem that the essence of my statement is "no progress". Perhaps that is a fair description, but given the data of the problem, the differences between the two sides, the intransigence of the Argentines and their unlawful occupation of British sovereign territory, it is hardly surprising that it would take some time to arrive at a negotiated settlement.

A week after I came to my present office, I went over to Brussels to keep our Community partners informed. I saw them last week and again kept them informed. I have had other contacts with them this week. This weekend I shall see the Foreign Ministers of the other countries in the Community, who are my opposite numbers. Therefore, I have kept in close touch with them. They have been supportive and helpful. I have had no communication direct from any member in any opposite sense. I referred earlier to a newflash that I had seen on the tape before I came into the Chamber. There is close contact between me and the other countries, which I intend to maintain.

Mr. Tony Benn (Bristol, South-East): Has the Foreign Secretary's attention been drawn to the fact that in *The Sunday Times* a public opinion poll showed that six out of 10 people in Britain were not prepared to see one Service man's life or a Falkland islander's life put at risk and that such a majority in Britain will not be rejoicing with the Prime Minister at the loss of life when the ship—[HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."]—was torpedoed without a declaration of war well outside the exclusion zone? Will the Foreign Secretary take account of the desire for peace in Britain by agreeing to a ceasefire and to the transfer at once to the United Nations of sovereignty of the Falkland Islands and its administration pending a settlement under United Nations auspices?

Mr. Pym: In making those points and others that he makes from time to time, which may be controversial and with which many people disagree, it is disgraceful for the right hon. Gentleman to attribute to my right hon. Friend

[Mr. Pym]

the Prime Minister the reaction that he has alleged. I believe that it is utterly wrong to impute such motives or thoughts when they are untrue. That spoils the validity of everything else that the right hon. Gentleman says.

Mr. John Peyton (Yeovil): Does my right hon. Friend regard it as indicative that the right hon. Member for Bristol, South-East (Mr. Benn) should base himself and his argument upon one answer to a question in a popular opinion poll? Does my right hon. Friend agree that it seems to be the general pattern of the right hon. Gentleman's remarks to put all sorts of sombre prophecies and suggestions into cold storage to be extracted perhaps one day to his own advantage at a moment of disadvantage to his country?

Mr. Pym: I think that a number of hon. Members would agree with my right hon. Friend. What the right hon. Member for Bristol, South-East (Mr. Benn) has said this afternoon was disgraceful.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): As the transfer of sovereignty of the Falkland Islands has been considered for 20 years or so, and as the Prime Minister has now had her skirmish in this atavistic and unnecessary exercise in the South Atlantic, which she and the chairman of the Conservative Party have launched, will the Government today order a suspension of hostilities before many more young men are unnecessarily killed and transfer the solution of the problem to where it should be, the United Nations, where eventually a negotiated settlement will have to be reached anyway?

Mr. Pym: I dissociate myself from the hon. Gentleman's remarks. Once withdrawal has taken place

and there is no prejudice to the outcome of the long-term negotiations, of course there will be a ceasefire. This issue is already before the United Nations. We took it there right away. Opposition Members sometimes seem to forget that. The United Nations passed a resolution requiring the Argentines to withdraw. We want that to be fulfilled and then we can get down to proper long-term negotiations. The hon. Gentleman's deliberate misdescription of what we are doing is not helpful.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Woolwich, West): If, as has been suggested by the right hon. Members for Bristol, South-East (Mr. Benn), and Lanark (Dame Judith Hart) and the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds), negotiations take place while the Argentines are in occupation, will not that be accepting aggression, which will be regretted not only by the Labour Party but by many other countries?

Mr. Pym: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. To take such a course would be to acknowledge that an act of aggression could pay the invader. That cannot be allowed. Incidentally, it would be in breach of the resolution passed by the United Nations Security Council. This is not just an argument between Britain and the Argentine. Its implications are wider. We are talking about international order and conducting the affairs of the world on the basis of law and in peace. That is what the United Nations is for. If we carry that through—we hope by peaceful settlement, but ultimately by a settlement—and if we right this wrong, I predict that the world, at any rate for a few years ahead, will be a more peaceful place than it was before. The re-establishment of international order on proper rules will bring an enormous amount of relief to an enormous number of countries and millions of individuals.

Falkland Islands

4.7 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Nott): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall make a statement about recent naval engagements in the South Atlantic, following the operation conducted by our forces to repossess the British sovereign territory of South Georgia.

In the House on 7 April I announced that our first naval action would be to deny the Argentine forces on the Falklands the means of sea reinforcement and resupply from the mainland. British submarines have achieved that objective. With the arrival of our task force on 30 April our next move was to stop reinforcement and resupply from the air, as well as by sea. Since the passing of resolution 502 the Argentines, instead of withdrawing, had continuously reinforced the islands. We gave two days' prior warning to the Argentine Government of the imposition of this total exclusion zone, and our task force is now enforcing it.

The task force was despatched to the South Atlantic with the support of the House and, I believe, of the country. Since its arrival in these waters our overriding duty has been to protect our task force against attack by Argentine forces.

We made it very clear to the Argentine Government and to the United Nations more than a week ago, on 23 April, that the Government would exercise their rights of self-defence to the full, including the use of force under article 51 of the United Nations charter if this proved necessary to protect our fleet.

I shall now describe the military sequence of events. Air attacks by Vulcan and Sea Harrier aircraft against Port Stanley airfield were launched early on 1 May. The runway was cratered and rendered unusable by transport aircraft from the Argentine mainland. A further sortie was made today to render the airstrip unusable for light supply, communications and ground attack aircraft operating within the Falkland Islands themselves. The other main airfield on East Falkland at Goose Green has also effectively been put out of action.

On 1 May the Argentines launched attacks on our ships, during most of the daylight hours. The attacks by Argentine Mirage and Canberra aircraft operating from the mainland were repulsed by British Sea Harriers. Had our Sea Harriers failed to repulse the attacks on the task force, our ships could have been severely damaged or sunk. In fact, one Argentine Canberra and one Mirage were shot down and others were damaged. We believe that another Mirage was brought down by Argentine anti-aircraft fire. One of our frigates suffered splinter damage as a result of the air attacks and there was one British casualty whose condition is now satisfactory. All our aircraft returned safely. On the same day our forces located and attacked what was believed to be an Argentine submarine which was clearly in a position to torpedo our ships. It is not known whether the submarine was hit.

The prolonged air attack on our ships, the presence of an Argentine submarine close by, and all other information available to us, left us in no doubt of the dangers to our task force from hostile action.

The next day, 2 May, at 8 pm London time, one of our submarines detected the Argentine cruiser, "General Belgrano", escorted by two destroyers. This heavily armed surface attack group was close to the total exclusion zone

and was closing on elements of our task force, which was only hours away. We knew that the cruiser itself has substantial fire power, provided by 15 6in guns, with a range of 13 miles, and SeaCat anti-aircraft missiles. Together with its escorting destroyers, which we believe were equipped with Exocet anti-ship missiles with a range of more than 20 miles, the threat to the task force was such that the task force commander could ignore it only at his peril.

The House will know that the attack by our submarine involved the capital ship only and not its escorting destroyers, so that they should have been able to go to the assistance of the damaged cruiser. We do not know whether they did so, but, in so doing, they would not have been engaged.

On 3 May, at about 4 am London time, a Sea King helicopter keeping watch against submarine attack around the task force was fired on by an Argentine ocean-going patrol craft. This vessel was then attacked and sunk by a Lynx helicopter. A second Lynx then came under attack from another Argentine vessel, which was itself attacked and damaged.

It must be a matter of deep concern to the House that there has been loss of life from these engagements including the sinking of the "General Belgrano", but our first duty must be the protection of our own ships and men. There may be further attacks on our forces and they must be allowed to act in self-defence. We cannot deny them that right. Nor must we forget that military action began by an attack on British marines and the forceable seizure of British territory. The way of stopping the fighting forthwith is for the Argentines to withdraw their garrison from the Falkland Islands in compliance with the United Nations resolution 502.

Mr. Denis Healey (Leeds, East): The right hon. Gentleman rightly said in his press conference last night that his policy was and would always be to use minimum force under strict political control to achieve a diplomatic solution. I confess that it is not always easy to achieve that in the stress of battle. Nevertheless, on the evidence that he has just given, it seems that he has successfully achieved that objective, first, in the reoccupation of South Georgia; secondly, in the attacks on the airfields and military facilities on the Falkland Islands; and, thirdly, in the actions that he has just described within the total exclusion zone.

I shall address my questions entirely to the action against the Argentine cruiser "General Belgrano". The right hon. Gentleman said that the Government were concerned about the loss of life that had occurred. I understand that the action took place 36 miles outside the total exclusion zone. Although it appears now that there have not been 1,000 lives lost, as we feared earlier, the number must run into many hundreds. As I said in questions to the Foreign Secretary after his statement, the loss of life is already causing great concern among our friends and allies all over the world.

Almost two days after the event it should be possible for the Secretary of State to give the House more details than were in his statement. It is in both his and the Government's interest to do so if widespread international concern about the incident is to be allayed.

First, will the right hon. Gentleman say how far the Argentine ships were from the task force? He said that they were hours away. I hope that he will forgive me for saying

[Mr. Denis Healey]

that that phrase is far too ambiguous and uncertain. It makes a big difference whether they were 50, 100 or 300 miles away. Any of those distances could be described as "hours away".

Secondly, what were the two escorting destroyers? Were they by any chance the type 42 frigate that Britain sold to the Argentine?

Thirdly, if the attack was necessary to protect our forces, could not action have been taken to cripple rather than to sink the cruiser? With respect, if the Government have pledged themselves to the minimum use of force, they must issue instructions that ensure that minimum force is used. I accept that it is not easy for submarines that were designed for global war against a great power to exercise the use of minimum force in a police action against a minor power. There remains the question whether it was possible to cripple the cruiser rather than to sink it, as was done to the submarine off South Georgia. That question deserves to be answered.

Finally, can the right hon. Gentleman explain why the Press Association reported earlier today that the "General Belgrano" had fired first and then later withdrew that statement as not being true?

I ask these questions in no carping spirit. If it is indeed the Government's intention at all times to use minimum force to achieve a political solution, they must avoid risking the lives of half of the population of the Falkland Islands in a single engagement.

Mr. Nott: The right hon. Gentleman is correct. I said at a press conference yesterday that it was our policy to use minimum force. The task force remains under the political control of the Government. It operates within a political framework. Nevertheless, in exercising minimum force it must bear in mind the overriding need not to endanger itself—our own men and our own ships.

We believe that the action took place just outside—about 35 miles—the total exclusion zone. However, as I said in my statement, the cruiser and the escorting destroyers were only hours' steaming time away. [HON. MEMBERS: "How many hours?"] The right hon. Gentleman asked for the precise distance. I cannot give it, as I am not prepared to reveal the position of our task force. Nor can I give full details of the exact composition of the Argentine forces operating against us. The right hon. Gentleman will know, because he, too, has been Secretary of State for Defence, that communications are not necessarily received instantly by a submarine. It sometimes takes time for communications to be made, for reasons that have to do with the natural concealment of the submarine, but the group was hours away from our task force.

Only two torpedoes were fired at the cruiser. It is impossible to say whether that would have crippled the cruiser—that could not be predicted—but, having fired its torpedoes, the submarine clearly could not remain in the area without endangering itself. Therefore, in accordance with normal procedures, it fired the two torpedoes and then left the area. I have not heard of a report by Reuters or the Press Association about who fired first, but I can tell the House that in this case, due to the serious threat that the group of Argentine naval vessels posed to our task force, our submarine was ordered to fire some torpedoes at the cruiser.

Mr. Healey: With great respect, the right hon. Gentleman's answer about the distance between the task force and the Argentine forces is inadequate. First, the action took place nearly two days ago. No one could assume that our task force would still be in the position in which, according to the right hon. Gentleman, it was identified by the Argentine destroyers at that time.

Secondly, those of us who have had the right hon. Gentleman's and my experience in these matters know of the difficulties of communication with submarines. But I did not ask where the submarine was. I asked where the task force was. The task force is a surface force in continuous communication with the Ministry of Defence in London, as we know from the hourly press reports from correspondents aboard some of the ships.

Mr. Nott: I realise that the right hon. Gentleman asked where our task force was, but that is not information that I think it would be prudent to give to the House. As he will know, the task force is within the region of the Falkland Islands, around the area of the total exclusion zone, but I cannot be asked to give precise nautical miles in a case of this kind.

Several Hon. Members rose—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I propose to allow 20 minutes on this statement and then to move on to a personal statement.

Mr. David Steel (Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles): I join in the congratulations extended to our forces on the success of the operation so far.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that the military policy remains as described by the Prime Minister in the debate last Thursday as being measured and controlled? The right hon. Gentleman presumably accepts that if the scale of loss of life already suffered by the Argentines were repeated against us in retaliation it would quickly equal the total population of the Falkland Islands. Will he therefore tell us whether there is a general directive to the fleet commander that all action must be taken only if it is totally unavoidable?

Mr. Nott: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his remarks about the skill of our men with the task force.

The right hon. Gentleman is quite right. The action of our fleet in the South Atlantic must at all times be measured and controlled. I wholly agree with him on that. I am sure that he will accept from me, however, that in the conditions in which our forces find themselves—repeated air attacks had been launched on them the previous day, we have reason to believe that there is a submarine or perhaps two operating in the area, and the Argentines themselves announced that they had sunk HMS "Exeter", brought down 11 of our aircraft and severely damaged HMS "Hermes", all of which is clear evidence that the orders of the Argentine fleet are to sink our ships—we must do nothing that endangers our task force, which went there and is there with, I believe, the consent of the majority of Members of the House.

Sir John Eden (Bournemouth, West): Is it not absolutely clear that, despite all the efforts of British Ministers, there can be no negotiated settlement unless the Argentines agree to withdraw, and that if they do not repossession of the islands by military means is unavoidable? As it seems that the Argentines have so far rejected every opportunity to come to the negotiating table, will my right hon. Friend ensure that the British task

force does not have to hang around for too long in inhospitable waters, but that any necessary military action to repossess our territory is taken with expedition and speed?

Mr. Nott: My right hon. Friend is correct. We require a negotiated settlement—a long-term peaceful solution to the problem—but that must come after withdrawal of the Argentine forces in accordance with resolution 502.

As my right hon. Friend says, the Argentines have so far rejected every opportunity to withdraw. I should not like to go into detail about the military options, such as repossession, that are open to us, but the best way of avoiding any further loss of life is for the Argentines not to challenge the total exclusion zone and not to pose a threat to our ships and men. The right way to ensure that there is no further loss of life is for the Argentines to withdraw their garrison from the Falkland Islands in accordance with resolution 502.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Will the Secretary of State assure the House that he fully appreciates that the massive support that we have from the United States and Europe is conditional upon avoiding huge losses of life, British or Argentine? Is he aware that there is now a real danger that we shall lose the support of our friends and allies?

Mr. Nott: I fully agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the support that we have so far received is based to a large extent on the belief that we shall not use more force than is necessary to persuade the Argentines to withdraw from the Falkland Islands. We are attempting to use the minimum force to achieve our objectives. I know that the right hon. Gentleman will agree with me, however, that nothing that we do or say to our forces must put them in peril. We have no choice but to take as our overriding duty the protection of our own ships and men.

Mr. Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): Does my right hon. Friend accept that most people in this country and certainly in the House will welcome his last statement? Is he aware that, above all, given the power, range and accuracy of the weaponry possessed by both the Argentine navy and air force, the House and the country would consider it a dereliction of duty if we did not take such action as was necessary to stop any attack?

Mr. Nott: The cruiser, although elderly, with its two destroyer escorts, posed a very considerable threat to our task force. All were heavily armed and the Exocet missile carried by the destroyer escorts is a potent and dangerous weapon for use against our task force. With a submarine in that area, we could not allow the Argentine group to go on threatening our ships and men, as it would have done if we had simply ignored it.

Dr. John Gilbert (Dudley, East): Is the Secretary of State aware that the Seacat missile on the "General Belgrano" would be of no significance in surface-to-surface engagements and that the dangerous armament—the Sea Dart or the Exocet—was with the destroyer escort? How does he propose to refute the suggestion that the attack was not aimed at using the minimum force to achieve the maximum military advantage, but that, on the contrary, it was aimed at producing the maximum casualties and psychological shock to the Argentines?

Mr. Nott: Obviously, I reject that charge utterly. On the specific points raised by the right hon. Gentleman, Seacat is not a surface-to-surface missile, and I never suggested that it was, but the Belgrano had 15 6in guns, which were a very considerable threat and have a very considerable range. What he said about the destroyers is, of course, correct as well.

Mr. Keith Speed (Ashford): It is correct that the guns are radar-controlled, that the cruiser carried substantial armour and that these ships would have been a significant threat to our task force had they been allowed to get through. Can my right hon. Friend tell us anything about the reports that the cruiser was afloat for some considerable time before it sank?

Mr. Nott: I cannot confirm the latter point. I understand that a report was issued by the Argentines initially that the cruiser was only damaged—that her propeller-shaft was damaged. If the evidence that we have had from Argentine sources is to be believed, the cruiser was crippled in the initial torpedo attack and did not sink immediately. But we cannot confirm that evidence. It comes from the Argentines.

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): The Secretary of State admits that the Exocet missiles on the destroyers represent a potent threat to the task force. Would not he and the Prime Minister have better met their stated objective of preserving the task force with minimum force if the submarine, if it had to be deployed, had confined its attention to the destroyers?

Mr. Nott: Had one of the destroyers been torpedoed instead of the cruiser and men had lost their lives, the House would have been just as deeply concerned about the loss of human life from the destroyer as about the loss of human life from the cruiser.

Mr. John Roper (Farnworth): Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that we share his view that ensuring the safety of our forces is the highest priority? Is he satisfied that the supply vessels and the troop carriers travelling between this country and the South Atlantic have adequate protection from Argentine surprise attacks?

Mr. Nott: I am very conscious of the need to provide adequate protection for the supply vessels and for troop reinforcements. It is, of course, a very important matter.

Mr. Julian Critchley (Aldershot): What will be the effect of the Falkland Islands affair on the future allocation of resources to defence?

Mr. Nott: With respect to my hon. Friend, I do not think that this is quite the moment to discuss that issue.

Mr. George Foulkes (South Ayrshire): Will the Secretary of State correct the statement by the Prime Minister and confirm that not all Members of the House supported the sending of the task force? Will he accept that it is reasonable for us all to believe that it has always been the intention of the Government to achieve a solution to this problem by military means, unless he can tell us, apart from putting forward one unacceptable precondition and a willingness to listen to other peoples ideas, what specific proposals for a peaceful solution have been put forward on the initiative of the Government?

Mr. Nott: The Foreign Secretary devoted a large part of his statement to that latter matter. The House generally,

[Mr. Nott]

I believe, supported the sending of the task force, although I am not for one moment claiming that every Member of the House did so. In the early stages of this affair, after the Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands, we had great difficulty in protecting HMS "Endurance" from the Argentines. It was only skill and to some extent good luck that prevented our losing a considerable number of the Royal Marines on HMS "Endurance" at the outset of this affair. When the Argentines first attacked Port Stanley they heavily mortared the marine barracks, believing that the Royal Marines were there. To suggest that we fired the first shot or that we are responsible for the hostilities—I know that the hon. Gentleman did not suggest this, but it is being suggested in some quarters—is a travesty of the truth.

Mr. Robert Atkins (Preston, North): Does my right hon. Friend begin to agree with the remarks attributed to Air Chief Marshal "Bomber" Harris yesterday, or the day before, when he suggested that too much publicity was given to the nitty-gritty of strategic and tactical decisions taken by the people on the high seas facing difficulties in protecting our interests and our troops? If he does agree, what steps does he think can be taken to rebut some of the nonsensical remarks by right hon. and hon. Gentlemen opposite?

Mr. Nott: It would be of assistance to us if retired Service officers and others would not speculate so widely on all the military options that are open to us. It would also, naturally, be of help to us if the BBC and other media could have rather fewer programmes of this kind, because we are talking about lives, and the lives of our own Service men, and at the moment some of these programmes go rather too far.

Mr. William Hamilton (Fife, Central): Will the Minister confirm what the Prime Minister said earlier this afternoon, namely, that the decision to launch the torpedoes was a political decision—in other words, it was made by either the Prime Minister or the right hon. Gentleman, or both of them together? Or was it made by the admiral on the spot? It is extremely important that the country should know who is making decisions to kill in the South Atlantic.

Mr. Nott: Throughout this affair we have kept close control of the rules of engagement that go to the task force, and that must be obvious. The overall political control remains with the Government and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was, of course, confirming that. That must be the case. We did not fire the first shot, and the day before the "General Belgrano" was sunk there was launched upon our ships a substantial and dangerous air attack. It was only because of the superior skill and the better aircraft that we have available that our ships were not sunk the day before. I hope that the country understands that very clearly. We cannot allow Argentine naval or air assets to be left free to attack and sink our ships.

Mr. Michael Latham (Melton): Did my right hon. Friend note last weekend the difference between the military dictatorship of Argentina telling lies to its people about alleged losses of British personnel and ships and their subsequent jamming of the BBC, and his duty to

respond fully and truthfully in the House, as he has been doing this afternoon, in our democracy? Will he assure the world and the country that any figures given by his Ministry of losses will be absolutely true?

Mr. Nott: We will do our utmost, given the distances and the problem of immediate communications, to publish nothing but facts. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. A great deal of propaganda and misinformation have been put out by Buenos Aires. There was no great sense of outrage when they announced that they had sunk HMS "Exeter", shot down 11 of our aircraft and severely damaged the "Hermes". Indeed, this was put out from Buenos Aires with great pleasure before we were able to deny it. There does not seem to be any predisposition on their part to hide the fact that they have been attempting to sink our ships and shoot down our aircraft.

Mr. Healey: May I ask the right hon. Gentleman once more if he can give us more details about the distance between the opposing forces, because this is critical in establishing the necessity to attack the cruiser in self-defence? The right hon. Gentleman told the House a moment ago that the Argentine ships were closing on elements of our task force, so presumably they knew where it was, and, since two of them survived, presumably the Argentine Government knows. The Soviet Government certainly knows, because it has three spy satellites over the area. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us where the task force was 40 hours ago?

Mr. Nott: I have noted that the right hon. Gentleman thinks that the Soviets know where our task force is. I rather doubt that that is the case. The "General Belgrano" was sunk about 30 miles south of the exclusion zone. I repeat that I cannot tell the right hon. Gentleman where our task force was then or where it is now. With respect to the right hon. Gentleman's natural wish to know how close the forces were, given the delay in communications that can arise between London and a submarine, the fact that I have told him and the House that this group was only hours of steaming time away surely gives him sufficient information to appreciate that these ships were a threat to our fleet.

Mr. Alex Pollock (Moray and Nairn): Does my right hon. Friend recall that at the start of the crisis the Government were criticised severely in several parts of the House for failing to anticipate the invasion of the Falkland Islands by Argentina? Does he agree that it is ironic that some of those same elements should now be criticising the Government for meeting the threat on the high seas and thereby protecting the lives of our Service men?

Mr. Nott: I have noted my hon. Friend's point, and I rather agree with it.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline): Will the right hon. Gentleman concede that no one in the House in his senses wants to see the conflict escalate? Both sides have proved in crude terms that they can inflict substantial damage upon the other. I do not ask him to give the exact position that was under threat by the "General Belgrano" and the two destroyers, but will he say whether our forces were within or outside the 200-mile exclusion zone?

Mr. Nott: It would be so easy for me to give the hon. Gentleman the answer, but I am sure that it would be wrong for me to do so.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Bristol, North-West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that our attacks on the Falkland Islands airports will have caused heavy casualties among Argentine troops? It is these wounded Argentines and the other Argentines who need evacuation from the Falkland Islands, not the Falkland Islanders. Does he therefore agree that it might be worth while offering to the United Nations for its use the hospital ship "Uganda" to carry out this evacuation of wounded Argentines and any other Argentines who wish to leave? This may well provide the breakthrough in the negotiating position, where there is currently a stalemate. It would be an act of magnanimity and it might enable the Argentine people at home to see the real picture of what is happening on the Falkland Islands, rather than the counterfeit picture.

Mr. Nott: I assure my hon. Friend that if, for example, the Red Cross wants safe passage to collect Argentine wounded, we shall make sure that it has it. If we can recover wounded ourselves, we shall do so. We shall provide them with hospital and medical facilities in our ships. That would be part of the Royal Navy's normal conduct of affairs. However, there is sometimes a problem. For instance, in the case of the "General Belgrano", if we had attempted rescue ourselves we would have been within easy range of Argentine land-air attack. If we are to perform this humane function, we must do so without hazarding our own forces.

Personal Statement

4.43 pm

Mr. Bruce Douglas-Mann (Mitcham and Morden): With your leave, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a personal statement.

I have already given notice to the Chancellor of the Exchequer that at the conclusion of today's business I wish to be appointed Steward and Bailiff of the Manor of Northstead—in other words, forthwith to resign my seat in the House. It is also my intention, however, as soon as the appointment has been effected, to relinquish it with a view to contesting a by-election in the constituency of Mitcham and Morden, which will result from my resignation. The right hon. Member for Bristol, South (Mr. Cocks), the Opposition Chief Whip, has agreed that he will move the writ for that by-election next Tuesday, 11 May so that the by-election can take place on 3 June. I am grateful to him for that.

The House will understand that a Member in my position has no control over the timing of a subsequent by-election. It may well wish in due course to consider whether that situation is satisfactory.

As most hon. Members will know, I announced on 10 December that I was leaving the Labour Party and joining the Social Democrats. I said then that it was my intention to resign from the House and to contest a by-election. This is not the occasion to discuss the reasons for my decision to leave the Party to which I belonged for over 30 years. However, I should like briefly to place on record the reasons why I have felt it right to seek the endorsement of my constituents for my decision. I do not wish the action that I am taking to establish any precedent—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that it is customary to hear a personal statement in silence.

Mr. Douglas-Mann:—for other Members who may find that they can no longer support the policies adopted by the party under whose label they were elected. That would be to raise the party above the individual conscience and judgment of a Member of Parliament, whereas I think that it is the judgement of each individual Member of Parliament on what is in the public interest that should always be paramount.

There are many precedents of Members who have crossed the Floor of the House without resigning. Perhaps the late Sir Winston Churchill is the most famous example. Whether or not one accepts that such a fundamental change as crossing the Floor of the House involves an obligation to seek re-election, I believe that there is none upon hon. Members who consider that their views have not changed fundamentally but who personally feel that their parties have adopted a radically different position since the last general election. That is the position of my colleagues in the SDP.

My position is different, because I have given specific assurances to the Mitcham and Morden constituency Labour Party, which I have repeated at public meetings, that if ever I were to leave the Labour Party I should resign my seat and contest a by-election. That pledge was first given when my loyalty to the Labour Party was questioned following my criticism in the House of mass picketing at Grunwick in 1977. It has been repeated at public meetings. I do not think it necessary to adduce reasons for keeping one's promises, other than that one has made them.

Rost, Peter
 Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
 St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
 Shaw, Giles (*Pudsey*)
 Shaw, Michael (*Scarborough*)
 Shelton, William (*Streatham*)
 Shepherd, Colin (*Hereford*)
 Shepherd, Richard
 Shersby, Michael
 Silvester, Fred
 Sims, Roger
 Skeet, T. H. H.
 Smith, Dudley
 Speed, Keith
 Speller, Tony
 Spicer, Jim (*West Dorset*)
 Spicer, Michael (*S Worcs*)
 Squire, Robin
 Stainton, Keith
 Stanbrook, Ivor
 Stanley, John
 Steen, Anthony
 Stevens, Martin
 Stewart, A. (*ERenfrewshire*)
 Stewart, Ian (*Hitchin*)
 Stokes, John
 Stradling Thomas, J.
 Tapsell, Peter
 Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
 Temple-Morris, Peter
 Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
 Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
 Thompson, Donald
 Thorne, Neil (*Ilford South*)
 Thornton, Malcolm

Townend, John (*Bridlington*)
 Townsend, Cyril D. (*B'heath*)
 Trippier, David
 Trotter, Neville
 van Straubenzee, Sir W.
 Vaughan, Dr Gerard
 Viggers, Peter
 Waddington, David
 Wakeham, John
 Waldegrave, Hon William
 Walker, Rt Hon P. (*W'cester*)
 Walker, B. (*Perth*)
 Wall, Sir Patrick
 Waller, Gary
 Walters, Dennis
 Ward, John
 Warren, Kenneth
 Watson, John
 Wells, Bowen
 Wells, John (*Maidstone*)
 Wheeler, John
 Whitney, Raymond
 Wickenden, Keith
 Wiggin, Jerry
 Wilkinson, John
 Williams, D. (*Montgomery*)
 Winterton, Nicholas
 Wolfson, Mark
 Young, Sir George (*Acton*)
 Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
 Mr. Carol Mather and
 Mr. Robert Boscawen.

Falkland Islands

10.56 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Nott):
 On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should like to
 make a statement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bernard Weatherill):
 Order. Has the Secretary of State the leave of the House
 to make a statement?

Hon. Members: Aye.

Mr. Nott: In my statement earlier today, I said that we
 must expect further Argentine attacks on our forces. I
 deeply regret now to have to inform the House of such
 attacks.

In the course of its duties within the total Exclusion
 Zone around the Falkland Islands, HMS "Sheffield", a
 type 42 destroyer, was attacked and hit late this afternoon
 by an Argentine missile. The ship caught fire, which
 spread out of control. The order was then given to abandon
 ship. There were accompanying vessels in the immediate
 area which picked up those who had abandoned ship.
 Nearly all the ships's company and the captain are
 accounted for. However, I regret to say that initial
 indications are that 12 men are missing and there are likely
 to be other casualties.

Communications with the operational area are difficult
 at present and this information must be treated as
 provisional until further reports are received. Next of kin
 will, of course, be informed first as soon as full details are
 received.

Further air operations were also conducted over the
 Falkland Islands today. In the course of Sea Harrier
 attacks, one of our aircraft was shot down. The pilot has
 been killed. His name will be announced after we have
 confirmation that his next of kin have been informed. All
 the other Sea Harriers returned safely.

The task force is continuing with its operations as
 planned.

Mr. Michael Foot (Ebbw Vale): May I first thank the
 Leader of the House for having responded to many of the
 requests from hon. Members that a statement should be
 made? May I also thank the Secretary of State for Defence
 for coming to the House to make the statement? As I am
 sure we all agree, it contains grave and tragic news. All
 of us deeply deplore the fact that the right hon. Gentleman
 should have had to come to the House to make it.

When I first heard the news, I thought that it was right
 that the House should wait for a while because the next of
 kin had not yet been informed. That is absolutely
 necessary as the next stage.

For the House to make the right judgment about this
 matter, it is better that we should have a statement
 tomorrow. We can consider that, what the Government
 may say and what we may say. I do not seek in any sense,
 in this moment of what could be a tragedy for some of our
 people, to make any political comments, but I hope that
 tomorrow the Government will be prepared to make a
 statement on the whole matter. We can discuss through the
 usual channels whether we should have a debate.

There are implications that arise and reflect on some of
 the things that have been said in the debates over the past
 few days and to which some of us referred in the debate
 last Thursday. But I suggest that the best course for the
 House is that the Secretary of State or perhaps the Prime

Question accordingly negated.

Minister should come to the House tomorrow and make a further statement in the full light of all these matters. That is the best way in which the House of Commons can give its judgment on the whole question.

Mr. Nott: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his remarks. It is of course grave and tragic news; I entirely agree with him. I am sure that the Government will wish to make a statement tomorrow.

Mr. John Wells (Maidstone): One cannot help feeling that the Leader of the Opposition is the prize hypocrite on this occasion. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member must address his question to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Wells rose—

Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. And before he does so, will he please withdraw the comment that he made?

Mr. Wells: I am asked to withdraw my remark about the Leader of the Opposition. I must say to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that I had the privilege—

Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Maidstone (Mr. Wells) must please withdraw the comment that he made.

Mr. Wells: I gladly withdraw the precise word, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I must say to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence that it is quite impossible for this House to conduct a debate across the Dispatch Box point by point in a conflict like this. Therefore, the remark of the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition—

Hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Wells: May I put this to my right hon. Friend? Is it not right that we cannot debate a conflict like this point by point across the Dispatch Box? We must see it in the broader issue. While we cannot accept—

Hon. Members: Sit down.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wells: While we cannot accept the views of the Opposition, we appreciate most deeply my right hon. Friend's expression of sympathy with the loss of life of our own men.

Mr. Nott: I would say to my hon. Friend that we shall of course keep the House informed as best we can. As soon as further details come in, we shall do that.

Mr. Russell Johnston (Inverness): Is the Minister aware that at this moment we would simply like to put on record our deep sympathy with the relatives and friends of those who have lost their lives in this tragic way?

Mr. Nott: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. I am sure that the whole House shares his sentiments.

Mr. Anthony Buck (Colchester): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the whole House is bitterly distressed at what he has had to announce? Does he agree that probably the best thing, in the interests of all of us, is that we should pause on it until we can talk about it tomorrow,

having thought about what has happened here? It is always difficult when one is opposing Fascist dictators, but let us think on it. I respectfully suggest, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that that might be the best course for the House to take.

Mr. Nott: I thank my hon. and learned Friend. We shall make a further statement tomorrow, and I hope that we shall be in a position to give more details then.

Dr. John Gilbert (Dudley, East): Can the Secretary of State tell the House now whether the missile was launched from aircraft or from surface ships?

Mr. Nott: I cannot say at the moment that there can be any certainty about that. It probably was an air-launched missile, but I would rather wait until tomorrow, until I get details of that kind.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): As a Member with a constituency closely involved with the task force, may I say to my right hon. Friend that the men concerned and their families knew the issues involved and knew the risks as well, and this increases our respect for their courage and determination?

Mr. Nott: I thank my hon. Friend for that remark.

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Is the Secretary of State aware that the city of Sheffield took a deep pride in this fine ship, this lead ship of the type 42 class of destroyer, as indeed it took a deep pride in its predecessor, which also filled a distinguished role in the Second World War? I am confident that the people of the city would want one of these Members, who has had the good fortune to be called by you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to express their deep sympathy with the families of those who may yet prove to be casualties.

Mr. Nott: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's remarks will be much appreciated. She is the name ship of the "Sheffield" class of destroyer and was the first of her class to be launched. I am sure we all appreciate what the hon. Gentleman said.

Mr. Michael Mates (Petersfield): Will my right hon. Friend accept that, tragic though the current situation is, it was unrealistic for anyone to expect that we could embark on this particular and very necessary course without suffering casualties? Will my right hon. Friend further accept that, provided that the Government neither over-react to this tragedy nor in any way weaken their resolve on the course they have set out on, they will have, and will deserve, the respect of the House and of the country?

Mr. Nott: It is the case that there has been a naval battle, if I can describe it as that, going on for several days and casualties to both ships and men are very likely to occur in that situation; so I agree with my hon. Friend in that respect.

Mr. Ian Mikardo (Bethnal Green and Bow): In the midst of the grief which we all share and which has been expressed from both sides of the House, can the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether the Prime Minister is still inviting us all to rejoice, rejoice?

Mr. Nott: I shall not comment on that matter, but I am afraid that I must make one correction to the remarks I made earlier. I said in making my statement that initial indications were that 12 men were missing. I regret to say that the latest news, which I have just had, is rather worse.

[Mr. Nott]

It is that the number of deaths may be as high as 30. But we really do not have sufficient information at this stage to give firm news to the House, and that is why I think it is better to wait until tomorrow.

Mr. Churchill (Stretford): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In view of the tragic nature of the news that has been announced by the Secretary of State and the undertaking that there is to be a further statement tomorrow, would it not be better if we moved on to other business?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I sense that that is indeed the mood of the House. I therefore propose to call two more Members from each side of the House.

Mr. John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the eyes of the nation are upon this House tonight? As someone who has been here for only 12 years but who spent six years fighting in the war, I found tonight some signs of panic on both sides of the House. May I assure my right hon. Friend that those signs are only temporary and I am sure that tomorrow the House will be resolved that we should carry through what the Government are determined to do.

Mr. Nott: I have noted my hon. Friend's remarks. I would not wish to comment on them tonight.

Mr. John Roper (Farnworth): Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that from this Bench we would wish to associate ourselves with the sympathy that has been expressed with the families of those involved in these tragic events? We await with concern a further ministerial statement tomorrow.

Mr. Nott: I thank the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Bill Walker (Perth and East Perthshire): Does my right hon. Friend agree that when many thousands of our Service men are on the high seas with the task force we

should be showing our united support for them? The last thing that we should be doing is trying to put a series of questions that cannot find answers because the answers are not available.

Mr. Nott: I very much agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Leo Abse (Pontypool): We all share similar thoughts in this tragedy and we are profoundly concerned that further tragedies should not take place. Can we have the assurance that in the statement that will be made there will be no attempt on the part of the Government to compound the initial error that brought us to this situation and left the islands without defence? Can we be assured also that in the light of our obvious vulnerability there will be no absurd reiterations of the inviolability of sovereignty without considering other aspects? Will we be told that our men will not be put to further risks by being sent by the thousands in the "QE2" into areas where quite clearly there could be further tragedies and further deaths? We shall be expecting far more resilience and far more elasticity than we have experienced so far from this Government.

Mr. Nott: The operation has been going on for several weeks and there has been only one fatal accident on the way down and one other accident. This has been due very largely to the great skill of the men taking part. The hon. Gentleman's other remarks were of a wider nature and I do not think that it is appropriate for me to comment on them tonight.

Several Hon. Members rose—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that it would be in the best interests of the House and of the nation that we await a further statement tomorrow. We shall now return to the consideration of the Local Government and Planning (Scotland) Bill.

[Continued in column 125]

Rost, Peter
 Sainsbury, Hon Timothy
 St. John-Stevas, Rt Hon N.
 Shaw, Giles (*Pudsey*)
 Shaw, Michael (*Scarborough*)
 Shelton, William (*Streatham*)
 Shepherd, Colin (*Hereford*)
 Shepherd, Richard
 Shersby, Michael
 Silvester, Fred
 Sims, Roger
 Skeet, T. H. H.
 Smith, Dudley
 Speed, Keith
 Speller, Tony
 Spicer, Jim (*West Dorset*)
 Spicer, Michael (*S Worcs*)
 Squire, Robin
 Stainton, Keith
 Stanbrook, Ivor
 Stanley, John
 Steen, Anthony
 Stevens, Martin
 Stewart, A. (*ERenfrewshire*)
 Stewart, Ian (*Hitchin*)
 Stokes, John
 Stradling Thomas, J.
 Tapsell, Peter
 Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
 Temple-Morris, Peter
 Thatcher, Rt Hon Mrs M.
 Thomas, Rt Hon Peter
 Thompson, Donald
 Thorne, Neil (*Ilford South*)
 Thornton, Malcolm

Townend, John (*Bridlington*)
 Townsend, Cyril D. (*B'heath*)
 Trippier, David
 Trotter, Neville
 van Straubenzee, Sir W.
 Vaughan, Dr Gerard
 Viggers, Peter
 Waddington, David
 Wakeham, John
 Waldegrave, Hon William
 Walker, Rt Hon P. (*W'cester*)
 Walker, B. (*Ferth*)
 Wall, Sir Patrick
 Waller, Gary
 Walters, Dennis
 Ward, John
 Warren, Kenneth
 Watson, John
 Wells, Bowen
 Wells, John (*Maidstone*)
 Wheeler, John
 Whitney, Raymond
 Wickenden, Keith
 Wiggin, Jerry
 Wilkinson, John
 Williams, D. (*Montgomery*)
 Winterton, Nicholas
 Wolfson, Mark
 Young, Sir George (*Acton*)
 Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
 Mr. Carol Mather and
 Mr. Robert Boscawen.

Question accordingly negated.

Falkland Islands

10.56 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Nott):
 On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should like to
 make a statement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bernard Weatherill):
 Order. Has the Secretary of State the leave of the House
 to make a statement?

Hon. Members: Aye.

Mr. Nott: In my statement earlier today, I said that we
 must expect further Argentine attacks on our forces. I
 deeply regret now to have to inform the House of such
 attacks.

In the course of its duties within the total Exclusion
 Zone around the Falkland Islands, HMS "Sheffield", a
 type 42 destroyer, was attacked and hit late this afternoon
 by an Argentine missile. The ship caught fire, which
 spread out of control. The order was then given to abandon
 ship. There were accompanying vessels in the immediate
 area which picked up those who had abandoned ship.
 Nearly all the ships' company and the captain are
 accounted for. However, I regret to say that initial
 indications are that 12 men are missing and there are likely
 to be other casualties.

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 at present and this information must be treated as
 provisional until further reports are received. Next of kin
 will, of course, be informed first as soon as full details are
 received.

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 Falkland Islands today. In the course of Sea Harrier
 attacks, one of our aircraft was shot down. The pilot has
 been killed. His name will be announced after we have
 confirmation that his next of kin have been informed. All
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The task force is continuing with its operations as
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Mr. Michael Foot (Ebbw Vale): May I first thank the
 Leader of the House for having responded to many of the
 requests from hon. Members that a statement should be
 made? May I also thank the Secretary of State for Defence
 for coming to the House to make the statement? As I am
 sure we all agree, it contains grave and tragic news. All
 of us deeply deplore the fact that the right hon. Gentleman
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When I first heard the news, I thought that it was right
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 kin had not yet been informed. That is absolutely
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For the House to make the right judgment about this
 matter, it is better that we should have a statement
 tomorrow. We can consider that, what the Government
 may say and what we may say. I do not seek in any sense,
 in this moment of what could be a tragedy for some of our
 people, to make any political comments, but I hope that
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 statement on the whole matter. We can discuss through the
 usual channels whether we should have a debate.

There are implications that arise and reflect on some of
 the things that have been said in the debates over the past
 few days and to which some of us referred in the debate
 last Thursday. But I suggest that the best course for the
 House is that the Secretary of State or perhaps the Prime

Minister should come to the House tomorrow and make a further statement in the full light of all these matters. That is the best way in which the House of Commons can give its judgment on the whole question.

Mr. Nott: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his remarks. It is of course grave and tragic news; I entirely agree with him. I am sure that the Government will wish to make a statement tomorrow.

Mr. John Wells (Maidstone): One cannot help feeling that the Leader of the Opposition is the prize hypocrite on this occasion. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member must address his question to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Wells rose—

Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. And before he does so, will he please withdraw the comment that he made?

Mr. Wells: I am asked to withdraw my remark about the Leader of the Opposition. I must say to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that I had the privilege—

Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Maidstone (Mr. Wells) must please withdraw the comment that he made.

Mr. Wells: I gladly withdraw the precise word, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I must say to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence that it is quite impossible for this House to conduct a debate across the Dispatch Box point by point in a conflict like this. Therefore, the remark of the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition—

Hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Wells: May I put this to my right hon. Friend? Is it not right that we cannot debate a conflict like this point by point across the Dispatch Box? We must see it in the broader issue. While we cannot accept—

Hon. Members: Sit down.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wells: While we cannot accept the views of the Opposition, we appreciate most deeply my right hon. Friend's expression of sympathy with the loss of life of our own men.

Mr. Nott: I would say to my hon. Friend that we shall of course keep the House informed as best we can. As soon as further details come in, we shall do that.

Mr. Russell Johnston (Inverness): Is the Minister aware that at this moment we would simply like to put on record our deep sympathy with the relatives and friends of those who have lost their lives in this tragic way?

Mr. Nott: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. I am sure that the whole House shares his sentiments.

Mr. Anthony Buck (Colchester): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the whole House is bitterly distressed at what he has had to announce? Does he agree that probably the best thing, in the interests of all of us, is that we should pause on it until we can talk about it tomorrow,

having thought about what has happened here? It is always difficult when one is opposing Fascist dictators, but let us think on it. I respectfully suggest, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that that might be the best course for the House to take.

Mr. Nott: I thank my hon. and learned Friend. We shall make a further statement tomorrow, and I hope that we shall be in a position to give more details then.

Dr. John Gilbert (Dudley, East): Can the Secretary of State tell the House now whether the missile was launched from aircraft or from surface ships?

Mr. Nott: I cannot say at the moment that there can be any certainty about that. It probably was an air-launched missile, but I would rather wait until tomorrow, until I get details of that kind.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): As a Member with a constituency closely involved with the task force, may I say to my right hon. Friend that the men concerned and their families knew the issues involved and knew the risks as well, and this increases our respect for their courage and determination?

Mr. Nott: I thank my hon. Friend for that remark.

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Is the Secretary of State aware that the city of Sheffield took a deep pride in this fine ship, this lead ship of the type 42 class of destroyer, as indeed it took a deep pride in its predecessor, which also filled a distinguished role in the Second World War? I am confident that the people of the city would want one of these Members, who has had the good fortune to be called by you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to express their deep sympathy with the families of those who may yet prove to be casualties.

Mr. Nott: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's remarks will be much appreciated. She is the name ship of the "Sheffield" class of destroyer and was the first of her class to be launched. I am sure we all appreciate what the hon. Gentleman said.

Mr. Michael Mates (Petersfield): Will my right hon. Friend accept that, tragic though the current situation is, it was unrealistic for anyone to expect that we could embark on this particular and very necessary course without suffering casualties? Will my right hon. Friend further accept that, provided that the Government neither over-react to this tragedy nor in any way weaken their resolve on the course they have set out on, they will have, and will deserve, the respect of the House and of the country?

Mr. Nott: It is the case that there has been a naval battle, if I can describe it as that, going on for several days and casualties to both ships and men are very likely to occur in that situation; so I agree with my hon. Friend in that respect.

Mr. Ian Mikardo (Bethnal Green and Bow): In the midst of the grief which we all share and which has been expressed from both sides of the House, can the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether the Prime Minister is still inviting us all to rejoice, rejoice?

Mr. Nott: I shall not comment on that matter, but I am afraid that I must make one correction to the remarks I made earlier. I said in making my statement that initial indications were that 12 men were missing. I regret to say that the latest news, which I have just had, is rather worse.

[Mr. Nott]

It is that the number of deaths may be as high as 30. But we really do not have sufficient information at this stage * to give firm news to the House, and that is why I think it is better to wait until tomorrow.

Mr. Churchill (Stretford): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In view of the tragic nature of the news that has been announced by the Secretary of State and the undertaking that there is to be a further statement tomorrow, would it not be better if we moved on to other business?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I sense that that is indeed the mood of the House. I therefore propose to call two more Members from each side of the House.

Mr. John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the eyes of the nation are upon this House tonight? As someone who has been here for only 12 years but who spent six years fighting in the war, I found tonight some signs of panic on both sides of the House. May I assure my right hon. Friend that those signs are only temporary and I am sure that tomorrow the House will be resolved that we should carry through what the Government are determined to do.

Mr. Nott: I have noted my hon. Friend's remarks. I would not wish to comment on them tonight.

Mr. John Roper (Farnworth): Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that from this Bench we would wish to associate ourselves with the sympathy that has been expressed with the families of those involved in these tragic events? We await with concern a further ministerial statement tomorrow.

Mr. Nott: I thank the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Bill Walker (Perth and East Perthshire): Does my right hon. Friend agree that when many thousands of our Service men are on the high seas with the task force we

should be showing our united support for them? The last thing that we should be doing is trying to put a series of questions that cannot find answers because the answers are not available.

Mr. Nott: I very much agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Leo Abse (Pontypool): We all share similar thoughts in this tragedy and we are profoundly concerned that further tragedies should not take place. Can we have the assurance that in the statement that will be made there will be no attempt on the part of the Government to compound the initial error that brought us to this situation and left the islands without defence? Can we be assured also that in the light of our obvious vulnerability there will be no absurd reiterations of the inviolability of sovereignty without considering other aspects? Will we be told that our men will not be put to further risks by being sent by the thousands in the "QE2" into areas where quite clearly there could be further tragedies and further deaths? We shall be expecting far more resilience and far more elasticity than we have experienced so far from this Government.

Mr. Nott: The operation has been going on for several weeks and there has been only one fatal accident on the way down and one other accident. This has been due very largely to the great skill of the men taking part. The hon. Gentleman's other remarks were of a wider nature and I do not think that it is appropriate for me to comment on them tonight.

Several Hon. Members rose—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that it would be in the best interests of the House and of the nation that we await a further statement tomorrow. We shall now return to the consideration of the Local Government and Planning (Scotland) Bill.

[Continued in column 125]

of the reactions associated with triazolam is similar to those for other benzodiazepines and the reporting rate for triazolam is within the range found with drugs in this class. There has been no increase in reporting, either in relation to triazolam or other benzodiazepines, since "Current Problems No. 5" was published in February 1981. The committee has therefore no reason to alter its evaluation of the risk-benefit ratio for triazolam if it is used in accordance with the dosage, indications and precautions in the current data sheet.

The Committee on Review of Medicines has reviewed all the benzodiazepines and has recommended the inclusion in the data sheets of additional statements on adverse reactions, including reports of abnormal psychological reactions. I understand that a revised data sheet on triazolam taking account of these recommendations will shortly be available to doctors.

Triazolam is not at present marketed in the United States of America, and the CSM has had no reason to consult the Federal Food and Drug Administration about this drug.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Namibia

Mr. Hooley asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contribution the United Kingdom is making to the United Nations fund for Namibia in the current financial year.

Mr. Hurd: Her Majesty's Government are making no voluntary contribution to the United Nations fund for Namibia in the current year, but we contribute indirectly through our assessed contribution to the United Nations regular budget. For 1982, \$1 million has been allocated to the fund from the regular budget.

British Atlantic Committee

Mr. Wellbeloved asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions in the last 12 months he has received representations from hon. Members in respect of the affairs of the British Atlantic Committee.

Mr. Hurd: Members of Parliament who are members of the Council of the British Atlantic Committee have called on me on a number of occasions. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office provides a grant-in-aid to the British Atlantic Committee and thus has a legitimate general interest in its affairs.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will now declare a 200-mile exclusive fishing zone round the Falkland Islands and dependencies.

Mr. Onslow: No, but we shall continue to keep under review the question of extending dependent territory fishing zones, including those of the Falkland Islands and their dependencies, to 200 miles.

Mr. Austin Mitchell asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will now declare a 200-mile mineral exploitation zone round the Falkland Islands and dependencies and initiate the letting of contracts for oil exploration.

Mr. Onslow: No. The Geneva Convention on the Continental Shelf 1958 provides that the rights of a coastal State over its continental shelf do not depend on any express proclamation. We are always ready to consider applications from oil companies which wish to undertake exploration.

Treaties, Conventions and Directives (Ratification)

Mr. Marks asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list, with dates, of international treaties, conventions and directives still awaiting ratification by the House.

Mr. Rifkind: In the sense in which the term "ratification" is normally used in international practice, treaties—and conventions—are ratified not by Parliament but by the Crown in the exercise of the Royal Prerogative on the advice of Ministers. The texts of all treaties subject to ratification are laid before Parliament as Command Papers for 21 sitting days under the practice known as the Ponsonby rule in order to afford an opportunity for debate.

Directives of the European Economic Community and the Euratom Community are not subject to "ratification".

Considerable research would be necessary to extract from the records the information requested. If the hon. Member would indicate any particular subject or period to be covered, I shall see what can be done to provide the information.

BBC External Services

Mr. Waller asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, in view of the situation in the Falkland Islands and the renewed attention devoted to Gibraltar, he will consider reviving the BBC external service in Spanish to Spain.

Mr. Onslow: The requirements of external broadcasting are kept constantly under close review. At present we have no plans to revive the BBC broadcasts in Spanish to Spain. A new taped service for re-broadcasting by local stations began in January.

Mr. Speed asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will discuss with the BBC the possibility of increasing its overseas service broadcasts.

Mr. Onslow: We are in regular touch with the BBC. During April we authorised an increase of one hour a day in the BBC's Spanish service to Latin-America and an increase in the world service's special 35-minute broadcasts to the Falkland Islands from one a week to seven.

Argentina

Mr. David Steel asked the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made seeking to protect the rights and secure the early release of the three British journalists now detained in Argentina; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Pym: We have asked the protecting power, the Swiss embassy in Buenos Aires and the British interests section, to take such consular action as is possible on behalf of the three journalists, Simon Winchester, Ian Mather and Tony Prime. In particular, we have asked the

Swiss embassy to try to obtain consular access and to maintain regular contact. To facilitate this, we have also inquired whether the embassy can ask that they be transferred to a prison in Buenos Aires. We still await replies. It should be understood that the embassy faces practical difficulties since the Argentine Government have declared the area where the journalists are held a restricted security zone. I am asking my colleague the Swiss Foreign Minister, Monsieur Pierre Aubert, to look into the matter on my behalf.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Family Incomes

Mr. Sheehy asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the effect of the 1982 Budget on real income movements since 1979 for a family with half average earnings, average earnings, one and a half times average earnings, double average earnings, three times average earnings and four times average earnings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brittan: The following table shows changes between 1978-79 and 1982-83 in the real disposable income of families with two children. Column (2) shows what real incomes would have been in 1982-83 if in the 1982 Budget income tax allowances and excise duty rates had been indexed in line with inflation in the year to December 1981. The difference between columns (2) and (3) thus gives a measure of the real terms effect of the Budget changes. NIC, child benefit, and FIS are at 1982-83 rates in both columns.

Real Disposable Income (1978-79 = 100)

| | (1) 1978-79 | (2) 1982-83 (indexation) | (3) 1982-83 (announced changes) |
|-------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|--|
| <i>Average earnings</i> | | | |
| ½ | 100 | 100.3 | 100.9 |
| 1 | 100 | 100.6 | 101.0 |
| 1½ | 100 | 101.3 | 101.7 |
| 2 | 100 | 101.6 | 102.1 |
| 3 | 100 | 103.6 | 104.1 |
| 4 | 100 | 109.3 | 109.8 |

Note:

Disposable income is gross earnings less income tax—assuming only a married man's allowance—and NIC at the contracted-in rate, plus child benefit and family income supplement where appropriate.

Customs and Excise (Letterheads)

Mr. Wigley asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to ensure that henceforward the letterheads used by the Customs and Excise Department for correspondence from offices in Wales will be bilingual.

Mr. Wakeham: Customs and Excise proposes to introduce bilingual letterheads for use in its Welsh offices as and when new stocks are ordered.

Excise Duty

Mr. Colvin asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are his forecasts for total excise duty receipts for the financial years (a) 1981-82 and (b) 1982-83 broken down by spirits, beer, wine, cider and perry, respectively.

Mr. Wakeham: I regret that final figures for receipts in 1981-82 are not yet available. The estimated outturns and the forecasts for 1982-83, made at the time of the 1982 Budget are:

| | (a) 1981-82 £ million | (b) 1982-83 £ million |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Spirits | 1,175 | 1,215 |
| Beer | 1,325 | 1,500 |
| Wine (including made-wine) | 482 | 540 |
| Cider and perry | 18 | 20 |
| Total | 3,000 | 3,275 |

European Community

Mr. Teddy Taylor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will show the payments and receipts for 1981 in respect of the European Economic Community which resulted in the United Kingdom being net beneficiaries of European Economic Community funds; and if, in particular, he will specify the dates of the refunds made in pursuance of the February 1980 agreements and the year in respect of which the rebates were paid.

Mr. Ridley: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Proctor asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether, in the light of the cost of the Falkland Islands task force operation, he has any plans to modify his public expenditure forecasts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brittan: I shall let my hon. Friend have a reply as soon as possible.

TRANSPORT

Vehicle Testing Stations

Dr. Roger Thomas asked the Secretary of State for Transport what extra costs the agriculture industry will face as a result of the privatisation of the testing of goods vehicles and the closure of rural testing stations.

Mrs. Chalker: In transferring testing to the private sector, the Government will ensure that the nation-wide service provided by the present network of testing stations is maintained. We do not expect rural stations to close, and there should therefore be no question of increased costs for the agriculture industry.

Aire Valley Trunk Road

Mr. Cryer asked the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the proposed Aire Valley trunk road proposal.

Mrs. Chalker: I have nothing to add to my reply to the hon. Member on 6 April.—[Vol. 21, c. 326-27.]

Driving Tests

Mr. Greville Janner asked the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will consider introducing a section on pedal cycle awareness into driving tests.

Mrs. Chalker: The present driving test takes account of candidates' awareness of pedal cyclists. This aspect can