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JOHN NOTT'S OPENING STATEMENT TO PRESS CONFERENCE NATO HQ
6 MAY 1982

I have just been informing my NATO colleagues of the current situation in the South Atlantic. This is a matter which profoundly affects the Western Alliance not only because British forces normally dedicated to the European theatre and the North Atlantic are involved in military operations 8000 miles away but also because of the important principles which are involved. In the British view it is scarcely possible to conceive a more obvious case of unprovoked aggression conducted while negotiations were in progress for a long term solution to the Falkland Islands problem.

The support which we have received has greatly heartened us. The Eurogroup communique as you have seen condemned Argentina's aggression and called for a withdrawal of her forces. Our Canadian and European partners have imposed significant and costly economic sanctions. These sanctions taken together with our naval pressure have provided the only hope of bringing about a peaceful and long term solution which preserves the important principles for which the Western Alliance stands. While this crisis remains one - that for geographical reasons - does not relate directly to the obligations which we all share as members of the Alliance, the NATO response provides irrefutable evidence of the strength of our commitment to the same ideals. It also represents a concrete expression of the growing recognition in NATO - reflected in successive communiqes - that western interests are not limited to the Treaty area.

But this is not to say there can be any deflection on our part from the Alliance's primary purpose which is to deter the Soviet threat. I believe that in an important sense the events of these last weeks have strengthened the Alliance's deterrence. They have demonstrated the solidarity of the countries in the Alliance in a crisis affecting one of its members and they have demonstrated the UK's defence capabilities in a fashion that could leave few doubts in Soviet minds as to their readiness and effectiveness.

Let me just say a few words about what has happened. Our first naval action was to deny the Argentinian forces on the Falklands the means of sea reinforcement and sea resupply from the mainland. British nuclear 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 United Nations 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.

We made it very clear to the Argentine Government and to the United Nations more than a week ago, on the 23rd of April, that that British 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.

On 1 May the Argentines launched attacks on our ships during most of the daylight hours. 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 by Argentine land based air and the Argentine Navy.

On 2 May at 8pm 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 had already warned a week before that we would act in self defence. We knew that the cruiser itself had substantial fire power and together with its escorting destroyers, which we believe were equipped with Exocet anti-ship missiles, the threat to the Task Force was such that the Task Force Commander could ignore it only at his peril.

It is a matter of deep concern to Her Majesty's Government that there has been loss of life from these engagements - our own men on HMS SHEFFIELD and the Argentines on the General Belgrano but throughout our first duty has had to be the protection of our own ships and men. My country was united in sending the fleet to oppose the Argentine aggression - in such circumstances although we have used minimum force throughout it cannot mean the imperilling of our own people against attack.

I need hardly add that the sad losses that have occurred have strengthened our resolve to achieve the important aim we have set ourselves of ejecting the Argentine forces in the Falkland

Island in conformity with the resolution passed by the UN Council.

The way in which the RN ships and aircraft have responded to these challenges are I believe evidence of the high level of quality and readiness on the part of the British forces. The production or adaption of military equipment to the unique requirements called for in a potential sub-Antarctic battle zone 8,500 miles from home must be a remarkable achievement by any standards. We have also seen how rapidly it is possible in an emergency to convert civil resources to defence needs including the conversion of more than one container ship to carry Harrier aircraft and civil liners to carry helicopters and how quickly the political will of the nation can overcome any doubts about rapid decision making when the situation requires it. There are now 20 warships and about 45 merchant ships involved in this affair.

Looking to the future, there can be no question of our turning back from the military objectives which we have set ourselves and the necessary defence of our own forces from continuing Argentine attacks. But we are still looking for a peaceful solution. We are launching yet another political initiative with this aim. Yesterday my colleague the Foreign Secretary put a new set of proposals to the United States in their role as mediator which we hope will be supported in other countries.

Our continuing efforts to find a peaceful solution will not falter but I must stress that these efforts can only be based on the precondition of Argentine withdrawal in accordance with Security

Council Resolution 502 in all its parts. If we have a cease fire without Argentine withdrawal, democracy will have surrendered to aggression and the aggressor will be in possession of his spoils.

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JOHN NOTT, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE IN ANSWER TO A QUESTION AT HIS BRUSSELS PRESS CONFERENCE TODAY 6 MAY 82

Nobody has wanted a peaceful solution to this problem more than I. I don't want to see any blood spilt in this affair. The first shot was fired by the Argentinians and when they invaded the Falkland Islands they mortared the barracks that was occupied by our Marines who fortunately were not there. It was only by the grace of God that we didn't have a lot of our people killed when they initially invaded the Falkland Islands and there has been some suggestions in the last few weeks that in some way we have been responsible for firing first. That has never been the case; we have exercised the minimum of force throughout this affair following an unprovoked aggression by the Argentinians on our Marines several weeks ago.

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22-17.

FALKLAND ISLANDS - HISTORICAL

CASUALTIES IN OTHER BRITISH OPERATIONS SINCE WWII

(see earlier brief) - C12-2

	<u>Killed</u>	<u>Wounded</u>
Suez	17	99
N Ireland (Regular Army) etc	351	3532
(UDR)	122	240
Borneo	23 British	67 British
	39 Gurkha	62 Gurkha
Malaya	349 British)	959
	176 Gurkha)	
Mau Mau (Kenya)	26	55
Korea	865	2589
Cyprus (55 - 59)	79	414
S Arabia/Aden	98	946
Oman/Dhobar (52 - 59)	7	6
(64 - 75)	24	?

Source: Army Historical Branch

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DPO(N)

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