

LOBBY BRIEFING

time: 1700 hrs date: 23 May 1982

We noted the three statements from Ministry of Defence earlier today. We had no news of air or other major military activity. The British Forces had established their beachhead and were now fanning out. Reconnaissance parties were moving inland. It was difficult to say how fast we would move. Argentine moral seemed low but no doubt they had well trained troops amongst their conscripts. We had no evidence that they were moving out of Port Stanley which was 50 miles from our beach-head. We appeared to control the skies. The operation was considered a major success. The lobby should keep in close touch with MOD.

The PM had spent the day at Chequers. There had been no meetings. No telephone calls. She attended church and was expected back in Downing Street soon after 6 pm. Tomorrow there would be a meeting of the group of Ministers. There would be a statement that afternoon probably by Mr. Nott. Cabinet would meet on Tuesday.

Asked about the future we said the entire political situation had changed; a beachhead had been established, we had not yet taken the Islands but so far so good. It was a different ball game now that we were back on the Islands. Public opinion had changed and would not permit us to give them away. Clearly we had faced up to the cost of sending the Task Force and having to use it. We had also faced up to the cost of remaining on the Falklands. Taxpayers' money would be involved. Mr. Pym in his interview on Friday had referred to the possibility of South American countries providing a military guarantee.

Asked about negotiations we said that our final position was as put to the UNSG and made public last Thursday. It had been suggested the Junta was blind, stupid, incompetent or incapable. In our view they were incapable of a settlement. The exercise was to get them off. We were not saying unconditional surrender as we were not seeking to humiliate them.

Asked about world reaction we noted that many Latin American countries were emotionally committed to Argentina and conditioned to territorial and border disputes but they accepted the need to deal with aggression. The Eastern bloc was quiet although the Russians were always up to no good. There were professional neutrals like the Irish but mainly there was sympathy for how we had responded and realisation that we had done all we could.

The Security Council was sitting and our lines to the UNSG remained open. It was difficult to see how there could be any improvement on past efforts unless the Argentines were prepared to withdraw. There was no evidence of this or of any conviction by them to do so. They had no credibility; they were totally discredited. We were likely to reply to the Pope's message tomorrow. We had not yet ^{had} his decision on his visit. HMG was prepared to distance itself from his pastoral visit.

Asked about the possibility of an early General Election we said that Cecil Parkinson's comments on 'The World this Weekend' were fully shared by the PM although she had not spoken to him before his interview. On behalf of the provincial press David Rose (Liverpool Daily Post) expressed thanks for the briefing and photographs provided by MOD.