

WILLIAM WHITELAW (HOME SECRETARY)

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PRESENTER: GORDON CLOUGH. So now Argentina's increasingly tenuous grip on the Falklands may be measured in hours rather than days, certainly in days rather than weeks. British administration is on the point of being restored. So the problem of what happens next is one which must be playing an even more urgent part in the deliberations of the Inner Cabinet. It was that problem I raised, this morning, with the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr William Whitelaw when I visited him this morning at his official home just outside London. But first Mr Whitelaw paid his tribute to the skill and the bravery of the men of the task force.

WHITELAW: It was obviously a remarkable operation and very, very skilful. Clearly, of course, we have got extremely skilful forces and I think this has become clear throughout the whole operation.

CLOUGH: And, as a Guardsman yourself, I should think you're pretty pleased with the way the Guards have come out of it?

WHITELAW: Well I'm hoping to hear even more, maybe, before long, as to how well they've done.

CLOUGH: But with Stanley, now, within only a few miles - presumably one must be thinking more about the future than about the immediate past - it seems very unlikely, doesn't it, that the Falklands can ever, now, return to the status quo ante - to the position that they were in before the Argentine invasion?

WHITELAW: Well, of course, it has been such an upset, clearly, there'll be a lot of stock-taking; a lot of time to sort things out. The Islanders have had a terrible time; they must be rehabilitated; they must be given encouragement for the future; they must be given a chance to say how they want to see their own future. But they won't be able to do that all at once.

Then there will be the security of the Islands and, clearly, that is going to fall on the British in the first instance. We would like to have other people associated with us if they would do so but, of course, we will have to bear, I believe, the main burden of the day.

CLOUGH: You said that you would like to have other countries involved. Do you think there's a real prospect of a multi-national force or anything of that kind?

WHITELAW: Well I wouldn't be sure of that but we have, obviously, hoped that, in various ways, the Americans would feel they could help us and no doubt they will be very prepared to consider what sort way they could help us and I think we've got to try and see that there is security for the Islands and that does involve more than us. We can provide it in defence terms but I think we'd want to see the Islands fitting in to the whole South Atlantic picture and if that could be done, sensibly, the Islanders do need some basic security which we, alone, would find it difficult to give them.

CLOUGH: Well Lord Shackleton's report, on the economic development of the Islands, has been taken off the shelf and dusted off. Could it be that Lord Shackleton, himself, might play some active role in the future of the Falklands; may be as some sort of interim Governor?

WHITELAW: Well clearly his report is very important. He has agreed to update it. What then happens, of course, is a matter between the Prime Minister and Lord Shackleton and it wouldn't be for me to comment.

CLOUGH: But one of the things that he laid great stress on in that report was the need for Argentine co-operation and that Argentina must have a role in the future of the Falklands. Now the Government (various members of the Government) seem to have said that there is

not, now, nor can there ever be - at least for a very, very long time indeed - any role for Argentina in the Falklands?

WHITELOW: Well, clearly, they have made it as difficult as they possibly can. First of all they invaded (an act of naked aggression) when they had been negotiating with us about the future. Then, when they were told by the United Nations to withdraw their forces, they refused to do so, have still not done so and we have had to repossess the Islands by force. That must, inevitably, change the whole situation. Argentina have really forfeited a great deal of the opportunities they had if they hadn't embarked on this mad scheme of invasion.

CLOUGH: It is said, despite that, that there is American pressure for talks - not tomorrow, not next week, but sometime not too far away - between Britain and the Junta about the future of the Falklands and the role of Argentina in it. Do you think we can ignore Argentina as a possible partner, of some kind, in the future?

WHITELOW : I don't think there has been that American pressure. Of course, before all this; and there was certainly American pressure to stop the Argentines ever invading the Islands in the first place on our behalf and on behalf of the world and that was very helpful. Then Mr Haig went through some very considerable efforts: always frustrated by the Argentines. I think they are anxious, of course, to see the whole of South America return to a sensible situation, naturally, but I don't think there's been any sort of pressure that you mention.

CLOUGH: Mr Whitelaw, the proponents of the conventional navy have seen the Falklands operation as a great vindication of their view that Britain needs a large, conventional surface fleet. The Prime Minister, when she was talking in Bonn, appeared to suggest, I think, that there might be a case for Britain taking on a rather different

role in NATO from the one she, at present, fulfills: increasing the fleet and may be withdrawing troops from BAOR. The Prime Minister didn't, in fact, say that in so many words but that could be an implication in what she said?

WHITELOW: We have, I understand, throughout the situation, fulfilled our military commitment to NATO and we are continuing to do so and I think our NATO allies are very grateful for that and it's important to say it. I've been talking about dust settling in the Falklands. Obviously dust has got to settle on defence policy here as well and I think it would be very unwise for the Home Secretary to start, at this moment of time, straying so far out of his area as to speculate on the exact parts of defence.

CLOUGH: There is an awful lot of dust to settle, actually, when it comes down to it, isn't there. When it comes down to it, there's a bit of dust to settle around the conduct of foreign policy over the last 20 years or so. There's a bit of dust to settle over the way that information has been disseminated or not as the case may be. Do you think we're going to get a whole series of rather dragging on inquiries?

WHITELOW: Well I very much hope not. One of the expressions I've always found valuable in politics is when you've had a great action with great stress and indeed taken, as I believe in the Prime Minister's case, with the most fantastic courage of any Prime Minister for a very long time. After it's all successful, as one prays it will be, then everybody gets their courage back. That's when they all start to quibble at one thing and another. It always happens; it's always the same; and they will. But if I was just to say 2 things. First, I think the criticisms of the

Foreign Office are very unfair. I believe everybody makes mistakes. Perhaps there were mistakes but I have a great admiration for the British Foreign Office and I think it ought to be said. As for the handling of news problems, that is immensely difficult. The primary objective of the Government must be for those men who are fighting on the spot; their interests must be paramount; the saving of their lives must be absolutely paramount and that must take precedence over every other piece of news management, in my judgement. There has been difficulty over the announcement of the casualties and much criticism. But that was felt, by those on the spot, not to give those figures of Bluff Cove would help them in the actions they were taking. I believe it is right for all of us - Ministry of Defence, Government and news media - to realise that that is the first objective.

CLOUGH: In just a moment, Mr Whitelaw, I'm going to be talking to a member of the Falkland Islands Council, Bill Luxton. Now he will have heard the reports from Argentina, as you will, that 2 civilians have been killed. It's an Argentine report, we don't know whether it's true. But there must be great anxiety, in the thoughts of Falkland Islanders who are outside the Falklands now, about the safety of their people who are, at the moment, in whatever numbers, in Port Stanley. Is there anything at all that the Red Cross can do or is being asked to do to make sure that those people are safe?

WHITELAW: Well I think that everything that could be done, from the British Government's point of view, is being done. The Falkland Islanders, of course, have endured great hardships and we would deeply regret if any of them were killed in Port Stanley. But these hardships, let's face it, have been imposed on those Falkland Islanders, from the very word go, by the Argentine.