

Carrington.

They
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must stay

British

IN THE Lords, there were restrained cheers as Lord Carrington declared the government's intent to ensure that the Falkland Islands and dependencies were free from foreign occupation. "The Argentine action has been in the most cynical disregard of appeals made by the secretary-general of the United Nations and the president of the Security Council," he said.

The government could not accept that the clear wishes of the Falkland Islanders, who were British by blood and wished to remain so by allegiance, should be frustrated by armed force.

Carrington said that initial Argentine claims about the invasion were clearly premature. "This is why we wished to be sure of the situation before confirming to parliament that the invasion had taken place," he said. "It would have been quite wrong for us to act on the unconfirmed Argentine reports."

He had heard it said that Britain should have moved forces to the area a month ago. But then, Richard Luce, a minister of state at the foreign and commonwealth office, had just concluded friendly talks in New York with his Argentine opposite number, and a satisfactory basis for further negotiations with Argentina seemed to have been reached.

It was true that the Argentine negotiator appeared to have been regarded by some in Buenos Aires as having been too reasonable, and on his return home there was considerable comment in the Argentine press urging the use of "other means" if negotiations could not be taken forward quickly.

"Had this been the first time over the last 20 years that some allusion to the use of force had been made from the Argentine side, it might have struck us as more significant than it did," Carrington said. "I have no doubt that had we responded to these statements by moving ships towards the area, we would have strengthened the hand of the extremists and increased the very risk we were trying to avoid."

Cynical disregard

Had Britain deployed ships as soon as the Argentine scrap merchants landed in South Georgia, the government would have been accused of inflaming the situation and reacting in a way quite disproportionate to the problem posed by the presence of a small party of Argentine workers.

"I know the house will join with me in making clear to all concerned our resolve to uphold the wishes of the islanders in the face of Argentina's cynical disregard of them. The Falkland Islands are British. The Falkland Islanders wish to be British. Our duty is clear."

For Labour, Lord Shackleton said the government should explain the extraordinary non-committal answers it had given in the Commons on Friday, implying that there might be no threat of invasion at all. It was not only the fate of the Falkland Islands and dependencies that was at stake, it was the whole south-west Atlantic, including the Antarctic.

Lord Byers Liberal leader in the Lords, said that the intelligence collecting services should be improved immediately if diplomatic and military initiatives were to be effective.