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On Plans ✓



DIRECTORATE

- 4 MAY 1982

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

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29th April 1982

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AUS (NS)  
Head of DS4  
Head of DS5

Dear John,

In my letter to you of yesterday I addressed myself to the particular question you had put to me in the House on 27th April, which was, and I quote from Hansard, that "one-third of the Task Force will be scrapped two years from now under the defence White Paper scheme". That was the point you put to me and, of course, my reply was in answer to that question.

For the record I should add that the suggestion in your latest letter that my announcement on FEARLESS and INTREPID was made "only a few days before the invasion" is just not true. The invasion of the Falkland Islands took place on 2nd April and my announcement - as I told you yesterday - had been made almost a month beforehand, on 8th March, based in turn on studies I set in hand much earlier than that.

So far as ENDURANCE is concerned she was, of course, still very much in the area at the relevant time and the Argentines were obviously not deterred by her presence.

1

The Rt Hon John Silkin MP



Be all that as it may, what I imagine you were trying to show, by your Question in the House, was that as a result of my White Paper of last summer we could not deploy a Task Force of this sort in the future. As I have made clear many times, we intend to keep two carriers and they will have a more sophisticated equipment fit than our existing ones. I have never sought to disguise the fact that some ships are due to be disposed of early. But other, more modern, ships will be coming into service, and our nuclear-powered fleet submarines will build up to 17 this decade. The fact remains that in 1985 we shall have more major ships operational than we have at present.

Yours Sincerely,

John

John Nott



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

29 April, 1982

URGENT : By Hand

Personal

The Rt. Hon. John Nott, M.P.,  
Secretary of State for Defence,  
Ministry of Defence,  
Main Building,  
Whitehall,  
London SW1A 2HB

*Dear John,*

Either you did not read my letter of yesterday or you are deliberately misunderstanding it. Let me quote my first paragraph :

"UNDER THE DEFENCE WHITE PAPER SCHEME a third of the task force would be scrapped in two years from now".

You must know that I was not referring to later conclusions you had come to which merely proved your original conclusions had been wrong, such as what you had announced over Hermes, Fearless and Intrepid. (Incidentally, the announcements on those last two were made only a few days before the invasion and at a time when you should have been aware that the Argentine Navy was at the ready.) As to Endurance, you were making the point three days before the invasion that Endurance was an irrelevance and you had certainly decided to scrap it at the time of the White Paper.

Can I now have the withdrawal of the reply to my question?

*John Nott*  
*John*