



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
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MO 17/3

25th May 1982

Dear John,

SPEECH TO CONSERVATIVE WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

My Secretary of State mentioned to you at the Back of the Chair this afternoon that it might be advisable to cross check the speeches which the Prime Minister and he were intending to give to the conference tomorrow.
/ I now attach a copy of my Secretary of State's draft.

A copy goes to John Holmes at the FCO.

*Yours ever
Nich Evans*

(N H R EVANS)

A J Coles Esq

SPEECH TO CONSERVATIVE WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

Madam Chairman

Your Conference takes place at a time when great and grave issues face our country. All our eyes are focussed on the South Atlantic. We are debating defence policy at a time when our forces are engaged in one of the most remarkable military operations in modern times. We have sent an immensely powerful task force in excess of 100 ships and 27,000 sailors, marines and soldiers 8,000 miles down into the Southern Atlantic Ocean.

Our forces, in a series of measured and progressive steps, have, over the past weeks increased their grip on the Falkland Islands. They have re-taken South Georgia. In a slow process of attrition they have denied the Argentine garrison the means of resupply. Then, by direct attack and harassment and, finally, by the successful amphibious landing at San Carlos Bay in the early hours of Friday morning, they have placed themselves in a position to retake the islands and reverse the illegal Argentine invasion.

In the latest phase, by the skill of our pilots, our gun line frigates, and those manning the Rapier missile batteries on shore they have inflicted heavy losses on the Argentine Air Force - over 50 fixed wing aircraft have been destroyed.

Madam Chairman, the theme of this Conference is living with our neighbours. It may seem inappropriate to be debating such a theme when there is an open conflict between Britain and Argentina and the lives of young men are being lost.

But the answer is that the whole basis of our foreign and defence policy - and indeed of the international political order itself - depends on amity between neighbours, co-operating with them and abiding by the rule of law. These are precisely the things which the illegal invasion of the Falkland Islands would have subverted and destroyed.

The Falkland Islands are British. The Falkland Islanders are British. They do not want to be ruled by Argentina; as those wonderful pictures of the welcome given to the British marines and soldiers when they landed showed much more clearly than a thousand words. The Falkland Islanders are part of the British family even though they are 8,000 miles away. Their phlegmatic, matter of fact welcome to our troops - "we were expecting you", "we only wondered why you didn't get here sooner" - were entirely characteristic of British people wherever they may be.

But there is another, wider aspect of neighbourliness which has been revealed by this crisis. It is the strength of our links with our friends and Allies in the Common Market, the Commonwealth and NATO. No nation these days can stand completely alone.

In the modern world when even the smallest and most insignificant nation has access to frightening weaponry and fire-power the rule of law depends on the balance of civilised opinion across the world. The policy of smash and grab is not known in international law. We must not allow it to succeed.

In the case of the Falkland Islands the justification of our case was immediately recognised by the passing of the mandatory UN Resolution 502 which condemned the illegal Argentine invasion and called for the withdrawal of Argentine forces. Our Common Market partners quickly rallied round by imposing economic sanctions on Argentina. These sanctions will be continued. Our NATO partners have been equally staunch and steadfast. Earlier this month NATO Ministers condemned Argentina's invasion and stressed the importance of maintaining the principle that aggression or occupation of territory by force should not be allowed to succeed. On Saturday the North Atlantic Council expressed the solidarity of their countries with the British actions.

Madam Chairman, our security depends on the collective security of the NATO Alliance, as various speakers have made clear. Although all our attention is now directed towards the Falkland Islands we must not forget that the main threat to our peace and security is still from the East, from the Soviet Union and her allies in the Warsaw Pact.

There is now a marked and growing nuclear disparity between East and West in Europe, an unremitting preponderance in favour of Warsaw Pact forces on the Central Front and a continuing shift in favour of the Soviet Union in the maritime balance. The Soviet arms build-up proceeds. Their naked unprovoked and illegal aggression in Afghanistan continues. The recent street demonstrations in Poland, obscured here by the crisis, show the tensions that exist in countries which have to live under the shadow of Soviet power.

These facts are recognised in the papers that have been prepared for this conference and in the excellent speeches which have been made. The Wessex area WAC paper on "Living with our Neighbours in NATO" pays welcome tribute to the contribution made to the defence of the United Kingdom by the people of the South of England. Whole communities have become intimately linked with the establishment of one or more of the Services. This is shown in the most poignant responses of local communities to the losses which have recently been suffered by our forces in the South Atlantic.

The paper refers specifically to the future of Portsmouth dockyard. Of course I recognise that defence policy must take account of the human consequences that major changes cause. I am glad, therefore, that the paper takes a balanced view. Portsmouth will continue to be a major centre of naval activity, as it always has been, and I salute the efforts of Portsmouth workers in preparing the Task Force for sailing to the South Atlantic.

But the fact is that we cannot stand still - there is always a need for change. The Falkland Islands crisis has lifted the veil to show people the immense sophistication and power of modern weapons. In particular we must always ensure that as much as possible of our defence effort is devoted to our teeth arm forces and as little as possible to support and infrastructure. This means rationalisation and, I regret, some job losses. From this point of view I agree with the Wessex WAC recommendation that we must make every effort to redeploy the experience and expertise of people who are affected by the streamlining of our establishments.

As this conference knows our economic policy is designed to create better climate in which new industries can sustain new employment. It is a pity that the signs that this policy is bearing fruit have been over-shadowed by the Falkland crisis.

I also wholeheartedly support the sentiments expressed in your papers on the "NATO and Defence" and "Nuclear Defence and the CND". I have always believed that the vast majority of the British people support the United Kingdom membership of NATO and reject the folly of unilateral disarmament. They see the need to maintain strong defences and recognise the part played by nuclear weapons in deterring war.

The Western area paper emphasises the need to explain our defence policy in order to counter the wilder arguments of the CND. We are committed to this. The public must be able to make judgements on these great issues on the basis of all the available information. As this conference will know we have published a wide range of information leaflets on topics such as cruise missiles, NATO's deterrence policy, the balance of nuclear forces and disarmament. Two detailed open Government documents explaining the rationale for the decision to purchase Trident have been produced. I and my colleagues have devoted a great deal of time and attention to explaining the Government's policy both in the House of Commons and in the country at large.

But I agree that we must not be complacent and there is always room for improvement, most especially for more work at the local level and where CND are strong and well organised. As the Western area paper points out we must explain our case in schools so that our young people have the facts before forming firm views. That we are succeeding in getting our views across is I think shown by the figures quoted in the Scottish WAC paper and these should be welcomed.

Of course we would all like to spend more on hospitals and schools but the figures show that people recognise that the only responsible way to ensure our security is to maintain strong forces and to negotiate for balanced and verifiable multilateral disarmament from a position of strength. The Government's policy must be seen in this light and I entirely agree with the recommendation of the Scottish paper that we should take the theme of "Disarmament in Partnership not in Isolation" as a useful and positive expression of our policy.

We came to office pledged to strengthen our defences and this is what we have done. We plan to implement in full the NATO aim of 3% annual real increase in defence spending up to and including 1985/86. We will be spending over £14 billion this year on defence.

Great progress has already been made. The Services are now up to strength. Their equipment is being modernised and improved. Older equipments types are being phased out. Major programmes authorised since we came to office - the new patrol submarine, the heavyweight torpedo, Sea Wolf improvements, Sea Eagle, Challenger improvements, tracked Rapier and the AV8B - are proceeding. We have taken significant steps to strengthen our reserve forces by announcing plans to expand the TA and to create a new home service force. For the RAF we have confirmed plans for a new generation of highly capable aircraft, weapons, ground support radar and communication systems. Finally, with Trident, we shall preserve the independent nuclear deterrent, the ultimate guarantee of our own security, until well into the next century.

The Falkland Islands crisis has, I believe, confirmed that the thrust of our defence policy is right. The Task Force itself is a standing tribute to the professionalism and preparedness of our armed forces, to the quality of our equipment and to the civilian staff who support our defence effort. It also shows that our force structure is flexible enough to provide a quick and effective response to developments both within and outside the NATO area.

But there are lessons to be learnt. We will have to wait until the issue is resolved before we can make final judgements. But a number of points are already clear. First, sufficient stocks of weapons, spares and fuel are vital to the success of military operations. Staying power - as we emphasised in our White Paper - is vital. Second, we must concentrate more resources on weapons rather than on the vulnerable platforms which carry them. Third, the crisis has shown that we must be prepared to be much more flexible in our plans to use civilian assets. The immense skill and improvisation which has been shown in adapting merchant ships to military use in the course of the crisis shows what can be done.

But the real lesson of the crisis is that we must be prepared to show will and resolve when our interests are threatened. Our people have responded magnificently to this test of national will. No greater tribute can be paid to the men of our Task Force than to say that they have fully justified the confidence placed in them by our people.

Our forces are now established on the Falkland Islands with all the necessary supplies, together with their heavy equipment and air defence missiles. They have mobility with a large number of helicopters at their disposal - and their spirits are high. They still face formidable problems in difficult terrain with a hostile climate. We must expect fresh attacks upon them, and there can be no question of pressing the force commander to move forward prematurely - the judgement about the next tactical moves must be his - and his alone.

But, one thing is certain. The days of the occupying Argentine garrison are numbered and it will not be long before the Falkland Islanders once again have their full democratic rights restored.

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Then our draft

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