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PRIME MINISTER

FALKLAND ISLANDS

Q1. Mr. Dalyell

asked the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the present position in the Falkland Islands.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher)

Following my statement yesterday, I must emphasise again today that, while the Government remain determined to do everything possible to achieve a negotiated settlement, time is fast running out. I know that Mr. Haig understands this and that he has been in touch with the Argentine Government today.

The Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of American States are still meeting. As Mr. Haig told the meeting yesterday, treatment of the dispute within the framework of the Rio Treaty would be neither appropriate nor effective: UN Security Council resolution 502 provides the surest guide to a peaceful settlement.

British forces in South Georgia have contacted all the British Antarctic Survey personnel and the two wildlife photographers. All are reported safe and well, and food and other supplies are being delivered. Arrangements have now been made for them to leave shortly.

Mr. Dalyell

What did the Prime Minister say to the Secretary-General of the United Nations' earnest request not to escalate the problem?

The Prime Minister

I am very well aware of the Secretary-General's request and that the Security Council's resolution must be complied with. It is Argentina that has flagrantly failed to comply, and it is because of that failure that we must now be free to exercise our right to self-defence under article 51.

Mr. St. John-Stevas

Is my right hon. Friend aware that, at a time when the House is rightly proud of the British forces in South Georgia and united in their support, it also firmly supports her efforts to achieve a diplomatic settlement of this dispute? Will she, even at this eleventh hour, consider a new step, namely, utilising the mediation services of the Holy See, which has unrivalled experience in such matters, particularly in Latin America?

The Prime Minister

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. As he knows, His Holiness is already mediating in a dispute between Argentina and Chile. His Holiness sent a telegram yesterday to Her Majesty the Queen urging ^[column 720]the Government to make every effort to find a peaceful solution on the basis of justice and international law, and he hopes and wishes to believe that such a peaceful solution is still possible.

Mr. Foot

The right hon. Lady's reply on the subject of the appeal from the Secretary-General of the United Nations was insufficient and unsatisfactory. Does the right hon. Lady not appreciate that this is a new element in the situation? Is it not extraordinary that she did not include any comment on it in her reply to my hon. Friend the Member for West Lothian (Mr. Dalyell)?

Will the Prime Minister look at this matter in a much fuller context? Will she undertake to ensure that the Foreign Secretary goes to New York to discuss this matter with the Secretary-General? We are supposed to act under the authority of the United Nations. Indeed, it is the only authority under which we are supposed to act. The right hon. Lady has a duty to the House and to the nation to ensure that the fullest and most immediate response possible is made to the appeal of the Secretary-General.

The Prime Minister

We have Sir Anthony Parsons an excellent ambassadorial representative at the United Nations, and he was there to receive this statement. In the second paragraph of that statement the Secretary-General said:

“In this critical situation, the Secretary-General therefore appeals to both parties to comply immediately with the provisions of Security Council resolution 502” .

That is our wish, too, and unless and until——

Mr. Spearing

Read on.

The Prime Minister

I am perfectly prepared to read both the first paragraph and the next.

This is a mandatory resolution of the Security Council, which has the force of international law. No statement can overcome something that has the force of international law. Also, under the United Nations charter, until that resolution is complied with Great Britain has the right of self-defence under article 51. We have taken, and continue to take, the view that unless we bring military pressure to bear the Argentines are unlikely to withdraw from the Falklands.

Mr. Foot

I put it to the right hon. Lady again that her reply is entirely unsatisfactory and does not come anywhere near measuring up to the scale of events. Will she now tell us the answer that was given by our ambassador to the Secretary-General on this matter? Will she respond to my suggestion that the Foreign Secretary, who went to Washington to discuss these matters with Secretary Haig, should go to New York to discuss these matters with the Secretary-General, too, before any further escalation of violence occurs?

The Prime Minister

I think that our ambassador's reply is likely to have been—*[Interruption.]*—of the nature that the best way to comply is for the United Nations to bring pressure to bear on the Argentine to withdraw her forces. If she withdrew them there would be no problem whatsoever.

Mr. Foot

It seems from the right hon. Lady's reply that she does not even know what our ambassador said and was making the answer up as she went along. I say to the right hon. Lady, as straight as I can, that if she does not make a proper response to this appeal from the Secretary-General of the United Nations—who is entitled to make such an appeal under the constitution of the United ^[column 721]Nations—along the lines that I have suggested, with either the Foreign Secretary or somebody else going to New York to discuss the matter—and I put it in a hypothetical manner—she will inflict a grievous blow to our country's cause. I hope that she will consider the matter properly.

The Prime Minister

I totally disagree with the right hon. Gentleman. If we were to refuse to take any further military action during this negotiation he would put many of our soldiers and sailors in jeopardy.

Hon. Members

Resign.

Mr. Foot

The responsibility in this matter rests with the right hon. Lady and with all hon. Members of the House of Commons. I ask the right hon. Lady not to take any further steps in the escalation of military matters and to give the House of Commons the chance of deciding what should be the proper response to the appeal of the Secretary-General. I ask her not to take any military action, but to take this diplomatic action after consulting the House of Commons.

The Prime Minister

I stand by the terms of the United Nations resolution and of the United Nations charter. Until the terms of that resolution are complied with and the Argentine forces withdraw we shall continue to exercise our rights under article 51. My reply to the Secretary-General is to urge him, as well as the right hon. Gentleman, to address his remarks to the junta in the Argentine.

Hon. Members

Resign.

Mr. Crouch

Is my right hon. Friend aware that the whole House welcomes the emphasis that she continues to give to working to find a peaceful solution to the crisis? In view of Secretary of State Haig's declaration that the United States will do all that it can to resolve the differences between ourselves and Argentina without further conflict, can my right hon. Friend say what differences stand in the way of a peaceful and honourable settlement?

The Prime Minister

As I said in reply to the hon. Member for West Lothian (Mr. Dalyell), Mr. Haig has been in touch with the Argentine Government today. We hope that that will be fruitful. The main stumbling block is that the Argentines have not withdrawn their forces, but have steadily reinforced their garrison. Throughout the whole of the period since the passage of the United Nations resolution they have continued to reinforce their forces on the Falkland Island with both men and materials.

ENGAGEMENTS

Q2. Mr. Dormand

asked the Prime Minister if she will state her official engagements for 27 April.

The Prime Minister

This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall have further meetings later today.

Mr. Dormand

Is the right hon. Lady aware that the belligerence that she has shown in the past two days misjudges not only the critical situation in the Falkland Islands but the mood of the British people? I do not in any way underrate the many difficulties and problems involved, but does the right hon. Lady agree that at this stage what is required above all else is a rapid ^[column 722]intensification and widening of economic sanctions, particularly through the agencies of the United Nations? At the same time, will she make it clear to President Reagan, in straight talking, that his neutralism will not be forgotten in this country?

The Prime Minister

I do not believe that we have misjudged the views of our citizens over the Falkland Islands. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will remember, too, that there are many British citizens living under occupation on the Falkland Islands. He will be as anxious as I am to see that they are not under that occupation for a moment longer than is necessary. The easiest way to achieve that is for the Argentines to withdraw their forces. They broke the peace first.

Mr. Colvin

Reference has been made to the attitude of the British people. They are resolutely behind my right hon. Friend. My question refers to the attitude of the Argentines. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the full resources of our propaganda machine are being mobilised so that the Argentines are aware of the real truth of the situation and are not being force-fed lies by their military dictators?

The Prime Minister

We are doing as much as we possibly can, especially through the BBC external services, to put out the facts of the situation. I cannot say how often they are heard in the Argentine.

Mr. Benn

Is it not clear from the Prime Minister's statements yesterday and today, and from the "Panorama" interview last night, that the Government never had the slightest intention of using the United Nations for the purpose of negotiation, or of negotiating directly under resolution 502, and that it was always the Prime Minister's intention that there should be only a military expedition? Is it not clear, to that extent, that she has hitherto grossly misled the House and the country?

The Prime Minister

The right hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense. I suspect that he knows it. The Government went immediately, the day after the invasion, to the Security Council, gained the support of many other nations and secured the passage of that resolution. It is over three weeks since that resolution was passed. It has not been complied with. On the other hand, Argentina has continued to make the situation worse. We want a peaceful settlement. The easiest way to achieve that is for the Argentines to withdraw their troops.

Sir Paul Bryan

As the rights and wrongs of the dispute have already been established by international law and supported by the Security Council, is not three weeks about as long a period of intense negotiation as can be justified if both parties are negotiating in good faith?

The Prime Minister

My hon. Friend is right. Not only have three weeks passed, but during that time the Argentines have put more and more reinforcements on the islands, which shows that they do not intend to comply with the resolution. As we have been saying recently, and as Mr. Haig has been saying, time is running out, because the military options in that part of the world must have regard to the weather and climatic conditions. We still require a peaceful settlement, and we can get one if the Argentines are willing to have it.

Mr. Speaker

Mr. David Steel.

Mr. David Steel

rose—

[column 723]

Mr. Foot

May I ask the Prime Minister these further questions? Will she publish as speedily as possible the timing and exact wording of the reply given by our ambassador to the Secretary-General's statement, so that we can all see what was said on behalf of our country? Will she reconsider what I have said about the Foreign Secretary going to New York? If the case is as good as she says, why should not our Foreign Secretary go to New York and state it there? That is what I ask for. If the right hon. Lady does not respond to my request she will do great injury to our country in the eyes of the whole world. As we act in this matter only under the United Nations charter, I urge the right hon. Lady to accept that the advice that I am giving her is in the best interests of the country as a whole.

The Prime Minister

I do not think that there is a formal reply to such a message. Various views are expressed informally, but it is not a formal reply. Formal reports are given by our ambassador to the United Nations, as they must be, about article 51 and the precise action that we have taken. We have full details of that. I stress to the right hon. Gentleman that resolution 502 is mandatory. Unfortunately, the United Nations does not enforce it and has no means of enforcing it. Therefore, we can only bring the best possible pressure to bear on the Argentine to enforce it.

As the right hon. Gentleman may have heard our ambassador say this morning from New York, there is no disposition there at the moment to return to the United Nations so long as Mr. Haig's peace initiative is in play. My right hon. Friend Francis Pym the Foreign Secretary has recently returned from Washington. I do not think that he could achieve anything by going to New York now.

Mr. Foot

Does the right hon. Lady's reply to me mean—I can construe it only in this way—that there is to be no official reply on behalf of her Majesty's Government to the appeal from the Secretary-General?

[column 724]

The Prime Minister

I can make an official reply if the right hon. Gentleman wishes. It will not be any different from what I have said, because the governing factor in United Nations law—I use the word “law” —and in international law is the resolution of the Security Council. The only possible thing that one can call upon the Secretary-General to do is to implement it. The only thing that I call upon the right hon. Gentleman to do is to use all his powers and influence with the Argentine Government to implement it.

Several Hon. Members

rose—

Mr. Speaker

Order. In view of the time, most exceptionally I intend to call the Leader of the Liberal Party. [Hon. Members: “Why?”] I shall tell the House why. It is because I believe in fair play.

Mr. David Steel

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The record will show that you called me before the time ran out. I gave way to the Leader of the Opposition. Will the Prime Minister clarify two matters? Were the proposals that the Foreign Secretary brought back from Washington commended to the Government by Mr. Haig? Have the Government made a detailed response to those proposals?

The Prime Minister

The proposals do not yet have the status of formal proposals. They are still discussions. We have let Secretary Haig know our views, but Francis Pym my right hon. Friend did that while he was still in Washington.

Mr. Hoyle

On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the news blackout on the Falkland Islands situation, which might mean that our troops have landed there, should not the Prime Minister make a statement on the matter?

Mr. Speaker

Order. It is unfair for someone who is trying to make a political point to raise it on a point of order.