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Margaret Thatcher, House of Commons PQs

PRIME MINISTER

ENGAGEMENTS

Q1. Mr. Marlow

asked the Prime Minister whether she will list her official engagements for 8 June.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher)

This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others before attending the address given by President Reagan in another place. Later I gave a lunch for him and Mrs. Reagan. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today, including one with the Premier of Bermuda. This evening I shall be present at a State banquet given by her Majesty the Queen at Windsor castle in honour of President Reagan.

Mr. Marlow

Is it not now time that the Government directed their policy in the Middle East in favour of the victim and against the aggressor? To that end, will my right hon. Friend tell the Israeli führer to get his extermination squads and infanticides out of the Lebanon? Will she remind him that self-determination is as important for 4¼ million Palestinians as it is for the Falkland Islanders and that the Knesset is no more able to get away with its booty in the Middle East than are the Argentines in the South Atlantic? Will my right hon. Friend combine ^[column 15]with others, by whatever means are necessary, to ensure the establishment of a Palestinian State alongside a secure Israel?

The Prime Minister

We supported the motion in the Security Council, which respects the Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and which we wish to see restored. With regard to my hon. Friend's remarks about self-determination, we believe in it as a principle. It is important both for the Falklands and for the Palestinian people, and we have never hesitated to accept that. We fully support the efforts of the United States to re-establish the ceasefire and we shall work with Mr. Habib to that end.

Dr. Owen

Is the Prime Minister aware that if peace is to be restored to the Lebanon, it must be obvious to many who watched television last night that something must be done about the United Nations' peacekeeping force in the Lebanon? It was clear that the Israelis had been in the Lebanon for a long time, as had the PLO. Will the British Government make a contribution to a serious United Nations multinational peacekeeping effort in the Lebanon, as we have made a multinational contribution in the Sinai?

The Prime Minister

The right hon. Gentleman will be as aware as I am of the history of United Nations peacekeeping forces. He will recollect that in 1967 there was a similar occasion when the United Nations peacekeeping force was withdrawn as a prelude to the hostilities that developed later. As the right hon. Gentleman knows full well, we still contribute to United Nations peacekeeping forces, particularly in such places as Cyprus. I share the views that the right hon. Gentleman earlier expressed, that these United Nations peacekeeping forces are too few and are not wholly effective, but I do not think that we can deal with that immediately. It is a tragedy, and only when we have an effective force shall we be able truly to stop aggression.

Sir Hugh Fraser

While I appreciate my right hon. Friend's efforts to co-operate with the Americans and Mr. Habib, may I ask her to recognise the fact that the provocation of Israel has been intolerable? Secondly, will she recognise that, because of the PLO and the Syrians, the State of the Lebanon has ceased to exist as a sovereign State, which has led to the problems that we face today?

The Prime Minister

I would not say that Lebanon had ceased to exist as a sovereign State. Its territorial integrity must be restored. We condemn all aggressive activity, whether within the Lebanon, on the Israel-Lebanon border or across that border into Israel. We condemn it all equally.

Q2. Mr. Beith

asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 8 June.

The Prime Minister

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Beith

Now that the Prime Minister has heard President Reagan's robust defence of NATO and the values that it exists to support, does she still believe that Britain's defence priority should be to maintain the ability to retaliate with nuclear weapons independently of NATO, or should it be to support NATO as a deterrent and strengthen the conventional forces that have proved so important to us?

[column 16]

The Prime Minister

Deterrence consists of being able to deter the potential aggressor. If the potential aggressor is a nuclear power, it would not be a deterrent to have only conventional forces. That would mean that an aggressor could promptly decide to go nuclear and we should have no defence. Therefore, we should have not only a conventional defence but an independent nuclear deterrent if Britain's belief in freedom is to be properly and fully protected.

Mr. John Wells

Is my right hon. Friend aware that although it is unfortunate that publicity should discriminate between one gallant corps and another, the Ministry of Defence and the media have given no publicity to the presence of the 36 Engineer Regiment in the Falkland Islands, which comes from Chatham and Maidstone? We hear little about these essential soldiers, whereas we do hear about the more romantic side. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that we shall hear more in the media about their good work?

The Prime Minister

I am amazed that there is something that has not been set out in the media. May I make it clear that the defence of freedom and the rule of law is indivisible and that the foremost efforts of every soldier, sailor and airman, and of the public in support of them, are needed if that freedom is to be secure? I gladly pay tribute to those soldiers to whom my hon. Friend referred, as indeed to them all. They never let Britain down. May we never let them down.

Mr. Greville Janner

Will the Prime Minister use this, the first possible occasion, to express the shock and disgust of the House at the cold-blooded shooting in our streets of ambassador Argov? Does the right hon. Lady recognise that no nation worthy of its salt can sit and do nothing while its ambassadors are shot and its people are terrorised from across its borders?

The Prime Minister

I gladly condemn totally the utterly brutal attack on ambassador Argov. He is a most distinguished ambassador, held in great esteem in Britain and a distinguished representative of his country. I am sure that the hon. and learned Gentleman will agree that the police were swift in their action and are to be congratulated. The hon. and learned Gentleman knows that we shall do everything to stamp out tyranny and terrorism wherever it occurs.

Mr. Walters

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the cynical Israeli aggression against the Lebanon is threatening peace in the whole area? Does she agree also that aggression should not be rewarded and that we should effectively combine with the United States? That means that the United States should not supply 75 F16s to Israel, since that action was one of the causes of the attack on Lebanon.

The Prime Minister

I have made our position perfectly clear. We support the United Nations Security Council resolution, which requires that the territorial integrity of the Lebanon should be respected. We equally condemn the aggressive activity and hostilities that have taken place across the Israel-Lebanon border. It is important to condemn such aggression and hostility wherever it occurs. It is equally important to uphold the right of self-determination. If one demands it for oneself, one must expect it to be applied to others.

Mr. Skinner

Which side are you on?

[column 17]

The Prime Minister

I am on the side of certain principles which I have always upheld and will continue to uphold.

Mr. Foot

May I concur with what the right hon. Lady said about the appalling attack upon the Israeli ambassador? May I also concur with what she has said about the rights of the State of Lebanon? Lebanon has as much right to exist as any other State. We have a duty to do our best to uphold its rights, along with those of other small countries.

May I revert to the Falkland Islands? Since the House last met, the military forces have conducted considerable operations with great skill and courage, as the House would expect. Unfortunately, British diplomacy cannot say the same thing. The right hon. Lady and the Government have sought to use the veto at the United Nations. Does the right hon. Lady not think that that is a regrettable development? Can she tell us what steps she is proposing to take to bring another resolution before the United Nations Security Council on which we can obtain the same kind of support that we had two months ago?

The Prime Minister

I totally disassociate myself from the right hon. Gentleman's remarks on our activities in the United Nations. The trouble with those latest resolutions was that there was not an unequivocal link between a ceasefire and a withdrawal, which is vital. In those circumstances, we were right to use the British veto. It is only the twentieth British veto, compared with the Soviet Union, which has used the veto 112 times.

Mr. Foot

That is not a good example for the right hon. Lady to choose. Some hon. Members believe that the British Government should not have used the veto in those circumstances—*[Interruption.]* That is not only our view it was obviously the view of many other countries that were represented at the Security Council. Nine countries voted that way and several abstained.

What will the right hon. Lady do about it next? This may be the best way of preventing further bloodshed. It may well be that the best way of securing an Argentine withdrawal, which we are all in favour of and which is governed by Security Council resolution 502, would be through the United Nations. We were very close to getting an agreement—*[Interruption.]* As our excellent ambassador at the United Nations made clear, we were close to an agreement a few days ago. Does the right hon. Lady propose, in the interests of preventing further bloodshed, to present a resolution to the United Nations Security Council with the object of achieving an agreement? That is the way to assist.

The Prime Minister

There is no obstacle in the way of Argentine withdrawal, except the Argentines.

[column 18]

Q3. Mr. Roy Hughes

asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 8 June.

The Prime Minister

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hughes

Admidst all the tension of international events, and during a busy schedule, will the Prime Minister consider the countless thousands of men and women who are at present standing in the dole queue? Now that the public purse strings are open once again, will she give early consideration to the authorisation of some major public expenditure programmes that will help to put those people back to work?

Furthermore, during the recent Versailles summit did the right hon. Lady discuss the Datsun project with Japanese leaders? We are most anxious for that to be situated in South-East Wales, where it can be linked up with the steel industry.

The Prime Minister

I did not discuss the Datsun project with Japanese leaders at the Versailles summit.

With regard to the hon. Gentleman's demand for more public expenditure, my right hon. and learned Friend Sir Geoffrey Howe the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a programme of public expenditure in the Budget, particularly designed to get construction work going. There is also an extended programme to assist further employment, operating through the Manpower Services Commission.

With regard to the hon. Member's own constituency, we understand that the Newport borough council area has benefited from £40 million in identifiable grants and loans from the European Community.

Q4. Mr. Adley

asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 8 June.

The Prime Minister

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Adley

Is my right hon. Friend aware of the widespread dismay at the support being shown by the Spanish Government for the Argentines in the current dispute and at their apparent inability to differentiate between the aggressor and the aggrieved, and between a free society and a totalitarian regime? In the light of that, will she at least consider reviewing the Government's support for Spain's application to join the EEC?

The Prime Minister

It is in the interests of Britain and of Spain's long-term future, that Spain should join the EEC. I believe in the wider and longer view that we must keep the democracies together and keep certain countries, such as Spain, within the democratic sphere of influence. Problems are much more likely to be solved if they fall within, rather than outside, the authority of democratic Governments. We very much hope that the gates to Gibraltar on the Spanish side, will be open on 25 June.