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Margaret Thatcher

Radio Interview for IRN (Falklands, NATO Summit) [*"Liberty and justice are valuable and we must defend them or they will die"*]

I

Prime Minister, in your news conference earlier, you said that there had been quite a considerable number of casualties in the latest fighting in the South Atlantic—I am quoting you. There has been a delay as far as any information on those casualties. That is of tremendous concern to a lot of people in Britain. Why the delay?

PM

Well it is of great concern to me too. I wish we knew exactly how many and exactly who. But you know when you get one of these terrible incidents and you do in hostilities and conflicts of this kind the first thought of all of those on the spot is to rescue the people and get them to the nearest casualty station so their wounds can be dressed and they can be properly looked after and taken off to the nearest hospital ship. Every single concentration is on that ... and you literally don't count because other things are more important. It takes some time to follow them up. Our first thought is to try to get information to the next of kin because they are worried. And it is very difficult to know what to do for the best. We now announce the names of the ships because otherwise everyone who has people in the Task Force is worried. Now of course we are up against those who feel that their people might have been on the ships or on those landing craft. We work as fast as we possibly can to save maximum lives and to see that people are treated as soon as they can. And the communications are not easy from there to here, either. And so I feel it too. We will get information to people as soon as we possibly can.

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What are your personal thoughts when that telephone rings or a message is brought to you with bad news from the South Atlantic?

PM

The same as it would be with anyone who carries great responsibility or anyone who has got a relative or a friend there. Is it bad news, as someone comes into the room? That's bound to be your reaction. But then I have to remember that we are the victim of invasion. We have to repossess those Islands, and we have to look after the liberty and justice of those people who look to us for their defence. And I remember that we are a free country in Britain and we are a very great country, because other people have been prepared to do it for us and we must live up to [end p1] the tradition and standards that they have set and we must not flinch from it. Liberty and justice are valuable and we must defend them or they will die. And with them would go everything that gives life its dignity and meaning.

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As the toll mounts do you sometimes wonder whether you took the right decision, whether you are following the right course of action?

PM

No, we took the right decision and we will see it through.

I

Turning to the NATO Conference here in Bonn, did the presence of NATO's newest member, Spain, cause any difficulties as far as the resolve of the Atlantic Alliance to back Britain in her conflict with Argentina?

PM

Within the Summit Meeting itself, everyone who spoke about the Falklands firmly supported Britain's stance. As you know, NATO has, too, issued a public statement—a very vigorous one—in our support.

I

Turning now to the Middle East, Britain seems to be taking a very strong line against Israel's attack. Is that justified?

PM

The Lebanon is an independent country. She has her boundaries, she herself is not a party to the hostilities. Israel has crossed in great strength and there are battles within the boundaries of the Lebanon and very far within indeed even in parts of Beirut. Of course we feel for the Lebanese people. I will feel especially because I liken it to what has happened in the Falklands. The Falklands were invaded by someone else. And naturally we condemn, and we condemn them, and we have to condemn too, we condemn too in the Security Council in the United Nations. And so did the United States. You see, look, you must get both a ceasefire, but a ceasefire linked with withdrawal. You need both things. [end p2]

I

There has been a statement by the Common Market, but we were rather expecting a statement from the NATO members. Why didn't that materialise?

PM

Because NATO itself is not a forum that has any standing in relation to matters in the Middle East. We in Europe have made declarations previously and have been trying to do all we could to help along the American peace process. So we really act through other fora and in the main we act through the Security Council in the United Nations. We are all very very concerned indeed about what is happening and that it should not spread and that the forces should withdraw and that we get a ceasefire. And I think we believe the United States is the country most likely to be able to bring influence to bear on Israel.

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Prime Minister, should the Common Market apply sanctions against Israel?

PM

I think that we are all very hesitant to apply United Nations sanctions because over a long period they don't work. Over a short period they may. And we are very grateful for what Europe has done in applying sanctions to the Argentine, but today there was no talk of sanctions.

I

Prime Minister, thank you very much.