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Margaret Thatcher

Radio Interview for British Forces Broadcasting Service (NATO Summit, Falklands) [*Both US and UK "believe passionately in the Western way of life. That's what we are here to defend"*]

Interviewer

Can I start off by speaking to you about the Summit in Bonn? You have been one of sixteen leaders. I've heard it said by a lot of people that President Reagan appears to be wanting to be seen to be very strong militarily, yet some people have the thoughts that in Europe the feeling is just a little bit softer, with not quite as much determination as President Reagan has. Where do you stand between the two trains of thought?

Prime Minister

Oh, absolutely four-square with President Reagan. We both believe the same things. We believe passionately in the Western way of life. That's what we are here to defend. If you are to go into any place where people assembled in Britain they were talking about Britain, and what makes it Britain. They say we are a free country. They would assume that we had peace with freedom and that we must always defend that. In a way that is what we are doing on the other side of the world in the Falklands. So that is the whole philosophy, that peace with freedom with justice and democracy and if you believe in those you have to have an organisation to defend them. Now none of us can do it alone. So the Alliance is the security that each and every one of us, whether it is in Europe, the United States or Canada and I think this Summit demonstrates that very very clearly. It is the first one of this kind which has been held since 1978 and you know all of us of Heads of Government have not been to a Summit before and it really did demonstrate a total cohesiveness. If I may put it this way—a new realisation that we must not take these things for granted, we must actually talk about them, talk about the values themselves and their importance and we'll know better the world over and talk about what we are doing in our defence. At the same time we say if we can make sure that we have enough defence then, providing the other countries take their armaments down as well and we can enforce that, then we would like to defend ourselves at a rather lower cost than at present. [end p1]

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Can I take this opportunity of asking you a question or two about the Falklands and firstly how difficult was the decision for you, Prime Minister, when you had to make the horrendous decision to send the Task Force?

PM

Well, one didn't hesitate for very long. Of course one went to Cabinet with a very very firm recommendation. There was no hesitation, a total unanimity. We just had to go. There was British sovereign territory which had been invaded. Even more importantly British people were being loyal, totally loyal to Britain, wished only to have allegiance to the Crown and everything we believe in, and they had been invaded by a regime not exactly renowned for its record in human rights. But we've been invaded and we had to go and get it back and we had to restore those people's rights. We shall do that. We have tremendous faith in the professionalism, bravery and courage of our armed forces and we are thinking about them in the Falklands almost every hour of every day. Now is there anything else we can get down there that they will need? They are superb.

I

The merchant seamen or the volunteers I am sure must hold a very special place in your heart at the moment?

PM

Oh, they do, and I am afraid they have suffered and you know it was wonderful when they were asked would they volunteer to go. All as one man they were keen to do something for Britain, they were keen, they had a new challenge and they rose to it magnificently.

I

The Captain of the QE2 was saying yesterday that his men would volunteer to go back again.

PM

They are very happy to have been part of this great expedition and the QE2 of course is due back in tomorrow at Southampton when she is bringing back some of the wounded from the Falklands.

I

There has of course inevitably been a loss of life and Mr Nott was making a statement in the House of Commons today. [end p2] I don't think he has given any figures about the latest tragedies there, but how do you respond to such tragedies as a mother?

PM

Oh, each and every one you feel and each and every time the telephone goes or someone walks into my room with a piece of paper or message your heart stops and you wonder if it is bad news. This is instinctive. Every family that has someone down there will do it. And yet we all know the lives of our forefathers were given so that we could enjoy freedom and justice. We mustn't let the next generation down and we must be just as prepared to sacrifice these things, because it is a wonderful way of life, and one has to think of it in that way if the sacrifices are tragic and we must look after those who suffer in every way but look at what it is for. It is for the whole way of life. It is for everything that is British.

I

You did make a reference to costs just now. Where do you think the line comes between the horrendous costs of an operation like this—and lets hope and pray there isn't another one to follow—and the costs against standing up against a dictator like Galtieri?

PM

Well, the costs have to be paid, otherwise there is no future. No future at all. I don't think the costs will be horrendous, the ships are there, there would have to be exercises on guard or doing some activity. The real cost comes in lives and in the equipment you lose or if you lose ships or aircraft, in the fuel and in munitions and in missiles, which have to be replaced. That is the money cost. The real cost of course is in lives and trained men and it is that which you hope desperately will not be too high.

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Can I ask you Mrs. Thatcher what you think the outcome of this conflict is going to be and when?

PM

Well, I have no doubt about the outcome. We shall repossess the Islands. We shall then start to reconstruct them and to help the people to live their ordinary lives again. [end p3] Remember that they have been through a traumatic experience and my guess is that they too will be superb, after all they are British. I cannot tell you when the operation will be over. Maj.-Gen. Sir Jeremy Moore The Commander in the field knows that we are to repossess the island, exactly how he does it, and what he does within the rules of engagement is up to him. He is the professional. We cannot fight battles on the Cabinet table. It would put great constraints upon him. We are answerable to Parliament. We have trust in the Commander. We have trust in the officers and men of the armed forces down there.

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What have we learnt from this operation that will stand us in good stead as far as our services are concerned in the future?

PM

Oh there is a tremendous amount about weapons and about deployment. Indeed I think that the many many people who come to us for advice. I tell you one thing we've learnt from the Summit Conference. Many many of our ships were ready to go and they went within 48 hours, 60 hours some of them, of being alerted, with full equipment and everything on board and that is of course is because they have to be on a very high state of alertness for NATO. So it profited for something outside the NATO area, that we were on a high state of alert when they attacked.

I

Will we keep the force there or will we maintain one?

PM

Oh we will have to maintain one for a time, most certainly. Those islands have got to be defended. We have not in fact sent people down there to risk their lives only to leave them without defence when we repossess them.