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Se refiere a:

12JUN82 1200Z(1300GB) – Transcripción de la BBC sobre exposición de Parkinson.

(Margaret Thatcher Foundation) (desclasificado 2013)

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CECIL PARKINSON (CONSERVATIVE PARTY CHAIRMAN)

Transcript from BBC Radio 4, The World At 1. 12 June 1982.

PRESENTER: GORDON CLOUGH. .. ... We still don't know the full casualty figures resulting from the attacks on Tuesday on the 2 landing ships, Sir Galahad and Sir Tristram. That we do not is the decision of the MOD on the advice of the military commanders here and in the Falklands. The Ministry hopes that the families of men killed or injured will have been told by tonight; but the anxieties of many families who hear nothing are bound, I would have thought, to be increased by the absence of an official casualty list. Mr Cecil Parkinson, in his capacity as Conservative Party Chairman, has been speaking, this morning, to Welsh Conservatives at a meeting in Llandridnod Wells. Mr Parkinson, of course, is a member of the Inner Cabinet. I asked him whether the decision not to release casualty figures was really fair to families of men in the task force?

PARKINSON: I think the MOD have been faced with a very difficult decision. The commander in the field feels that it would be of operational value to the enemy to know the full figures and, therefore he feels that it might actually put the lives of more of our people at risk, or hamper him, if those figures were announced in full. As John Nott said, therefore, operationally we were asked not to give that information. At the same time, obviously, the MOD wants to make sure that the families of those affected are informed as soon as possible and so they have been mounting a major campaign to make sure that every next of kin has been informed as quickly as possible if a relative has been affected. And so we've had these 2 very difficult things to reconcile: the need to try to help our forces who are still there, still fighting

and the need, at the same time, to try to set at rest the worries of the families and it hasn't been an easy thing to reconcile.

CLOUGH: I can quite see that. But could I put to you a point that one Labour Foreign Affairs Spokesman, Mr Clinton Davies, has been making. He said that all I know is that if I had a relative in the task force I'd be utterly desperate?

PARKINSON: I'm sure that I can understand why he's said it but I hope he would understand, equally, that putting the lives of more of our people, unnecessarily, at risk by releasing information that might help the enemy is also something that one wishes to avoid.

CLOUGH: Well let me press you, you know, more on what is clearly a very delicate and difficult subject and turn to the speech that you've been making this morning. I notice that in it you quote that famous quote from the Colour Sergeant from the task force who said that if the Falklands were worth dying for, they were worth keeping. Now does that very firm statement from you indicate, perhaps, an increasing determination in the minds of the Government, that, under no circumstances, ever, can there be any sort of Argentine presence or share in presence and the control of the islands?

PARKINSON: What I went on to say, after quoting him, was that he did reflect the view of millions of people in this country which is that the actions of the Argentines, over the last few weeks, have made things that might previously have been possible now almost impossible.

CLOUGH: You also said: we know now, sadly, that Argentina understands only one language; that of firmness of purpose backed up by force. Now that suggests that there can, in the Government's mind, be, really, no further thought of any kind of negotiation, of UN initiative - the

kind of thing that Mr Foot would like to see.

PARKINSON: What that reflects is something very straightforward. It reflects the fact that, for a period of 7-8 weeks, we pursued, by every means at our disposal, the search for a peaceful negotiated solution. They've all met with the same response from the Argentinians - a consistent rejection - and even the other day, when our Commander In Chief said you are now surrounded, in your own interests let's negotiate an honourable cease fire and your withdrawal; their response was to bomb our ships.

CLOUGH: There's been a great deal of talk - both in this country and outside - urging the Government to avoid, if it can, the humiliation of Argentina. There was a further such call, last night, from the West German Deputy Foreign Minister, Mr Cuturier. He said that he feared the humiliation of Argentina, which he thinks is what's going to happen, could ruin the West's relations with Latin America for years to come. Not just with Argentina but with many other Latin American States. Is that a concern of yours too?

PARKINSON: Well, of course, that's something we wish to avoid; but, equally, we have never been in the business of humiliating Argentina. We didn't break off negotiations with Argentina, they closed the diplomatic channels. They are the ones who have been totally intransigent throughout this whole episode.

CLOUGH: I don't know whether you've yet had the chance of reading the quite extraordinary interview in the Times, this morning, with President Galtieri done by Oriana Falacci. It's quite clear from what he says there, if he means it, that he is quite determined - even when Argentina is driven off the Falkland Islands - that the Falkland Islands will still be a major objective of Argentina's expansionist policy. It doesn't look as though the future of the Falklands, after

the clearance of the Argentines, is going to be a very peaceful and happy one, does it?

PARKINSON: I think we'll have to wait and see. We have an immediate objective, now, which is to repossess our territory with the minimum loss of life.

CLOUGH : But will it be long, do you think, Mr Parkinson. It's clear, from reports from the Falklands, that the troops there are chafing at the bit, they want to get in there. Do you think they'll be able to do that soon?

PARKINSON: That is entirely a matter for the military commander in whom we have total confidence.

CLOUGH: Mr Cecil Parkinson.