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## Margaret Thatcher House of Commons PQs

### PRIME MINISTER

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#### ENGAGEMENTS

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##### Q1. Mr. Cunliffe

asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 6 May.

##### **The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher)**

This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

##### Mr. Cunliffe

Does the Prime Minister agree that it would be catastrophic if nurses and ancillary workers in the National Health Service had to take strike action to [column 279]achieve a just and living wage? Does she accept that there will be widespread support if nurses and ancillary workers have, reluctantly, to take industrial action? Does she consider that it would be wiser and more prudent if she were to meet Health Service unions to discuss a further improved offer, and will she arrange immediately to call such a meeting? [Interruption.] There is support on both sides of the House for such a course, regardless of what Conservative Members are shouting now. That support is reflected in letters written to the *Nursing Mirror* in support of the nurses' cause.

##### **The Prime Minister**

I do not believe that nurses would do anything so detrimental to the interests of their patients as to go on strike. I believe that they are far more professional and far more dedicated to their work than that. Even before the present offer the Government are paying the nurses 76 per cent. more than was being paid on the day that we come into office. Part of the reason for that is that there are far more nurses now than when we took office. That shows that the Government have tried to have extra people in the NHS, especially when they are in direct contact with the patient.

##### Mr. John Page

During my right hon. Friend's extremely busy and responsible day will she try to find a few moments to listen to the radio and watch television, and judge for herself whether she feels that the British case on the Falkland Islands is being presented in a way that is likely to give due confidence to our friends overseas and support and encouragement to our Service men and their devoted families?

##### **The Prime Minister**

Judging by many of the comments that I have heard from those who watch and listen more than I do, many people are very concerned indeed that the case for our British forces is not being put over fully and effectively. I understand that there are times when it seems that we and the Argentines are being treated almost as equals and almost on a neutral basis. I understand that there are occasions when some commentators will say that the Argentines did something and then "the British" did something. I can only say that if this is so it gives offence and causes great emotion among many people.

##### Mr. Foot

On the question of the diplomatic discussions about the crisis itself, does the right hon. Lady agree that there appears to be a real chance of a move towards a sensible ceasefire, leading to other developments, and that there is also a chance of moving towards a real peace settlement? Does she agree that everything possible should be done to nurture that chance, and that nothing should be done to injure it? In particular, will she say what is her response and that of the Government to the proposals from the Secretary-General of the United Nations? My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) suggested that we should respond at once to those proposals, and I hope that the right hon. Lady will give a full statement to the House about it.

##### **The Prime Minister**

Of course we are doing everything possible to pursue the diplomatic path to a negotiated settlement. However, the right hon. Gentleman knows that at the moment there are two sets of proposals. There is the one that is being pursued by the United States through Peru, to which we have made a very constructive response, and we hope to hear more about that today.

[column 280] Whether the Argentines will respond in the same way, we do not know. The other one is being pursued through the Secretary-General, to which the right hon. Gentleman referred. There have been various rather conflicting reports about the Argentine response to that, but it seems clear—perhaps the right hon. Gentleman heard our ambassador on the news at 1 o'clock today—that they are very interested in a ceasefire. They may not accept withdrawal, and they may do it on a totally different basis, or require undertakings on sovereignty. So there is some doubt about what they have said. I believe that they have probably said that they are prepared to discuss it further with the Secretary-General.

The right hon. Gentleman asks me what our position is. We welcome the ideas that the Secretary-General has put forward and can accept them as a framework on which more specific proposals could be built. We are sending a message to the Secretary-General today to that effect.

May I make one more observation. It would not be impossible—indeed, it may well be likely—that the Argentines are concentrating on a ceasefire without withdrawal. That would be a very evident ploy to keep them in possession of their ill-gotten gains, and we are right to be very wary of it. The whole of the mandatory resolution 502 has to be accepted, and there can be no ceasefire unless it is accompanied by a withdrawal that is fully and properly supervised.

### **Mr. Foot**

Of course I understand that it may very well be the case that there is—[Hon. Members: “Agree with it.”] I well understand that there may well be great ambiguity in the reply that has come from the Argentine Government, but can the right hon. Lady tell us whether the Secretary-General's proposals include a linkage between the withdrawal and the ceasefire? If so, presumably that is one of the reasons why she has given, I should have thought, a positive answer. Certainly I welcome the tone in which she spoke about the response to the Secretary-General's suggestions. I very much hope that we shall be able to proceed along those lines.

May I also ask the right hon. Lady whether she will respond to what I said earlier on another aspect of the matter? In view of the considerable improvement in the diplomatic exchanges that are now taking place—I am not referring to the Argentine Government now, but to the right hon. Lady's response—can she give us an absolute assurance—I am sure that the whole country would want that—that there will not be any deliberate escalation of the military action itself, any escalation that could injure the prospects that now appear to be much more hopeful of getting a real peace?

### **The Prime Minister**

The right hon. Gentleman asked me first about the Secretary-General's proposals. It is, of course, for him to say what they are. May I stress that they are very much a framework. There are no specific details attached to them, and no timetable, but they link cessation of hostilities with withdrawal, as one would expect in view of the Security Council's resolution. Beyond that, I am afraid, there is no timing and no practical arrangements. They really are a basis for discussion.

With regard to what the right hon. Gentleman said about there seeming to be a change in the climate of diplomatic negotiations, I think that it was not a justifiable comment. The Secretary-General's proposals are now the [column 281] sixth set of proposals that I and my colleagues have pursued in detail over the past month. That is hardly a lack of diplomatic activity.

### **Mr. Foot**

I am much more interested in getting progress in these discussions than in scoring any point off the right hon. Lady. We who have urged all through the crisis that this kind of response should be made to approaches from the Secretary-General have a right to say that. I fully understand that these are procedural proposals, first of all, from the Secretary-General, but we very much hope that over the next 24 hours or two or three days the maximum possible support can be given to those original proposals.

### **The Prime Minister**

These are framework proposals. We are making a positive response to them. We hope to hear more about the Peruvian-United States proposals today, but I stress again that any proposals, if they are to be acceptable, if they are to work and if they are to command confidence, must be precise as to the timing and sequence and verification of events.

### **Mr. Viggers**

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the initial evenhanded approach of the United States Government—constructive to settlement though it may have been intended to be—may have given the impression to the Argentine leaders and people—and, indeed to the world—that there is some justice in the Argentine cause? Does she agree that it is incumbent upon the United States now to make quite clear its support for our attitude in resisting aggression, and that in this way it will assist the Argentine leaders and people to realise their true position?

### **The Prime Minister**

As my hon. Friend knows, we now have the total support of the United States, which we would expect, and which I think we always expected to have. I doubt whether its activities as a mediator—which we supported, and we were grateful to Mr. Haig for what he did—would ever have led people to think that there was any justice in the Argentine cause. The condemnation of the Argentine was almost universal, because the Argentine became an aggressor. Now, in the remarks that are being made, we must always remember that the Argentine was the aggressor. Two days before that invasion, the same Mr. Costa Mendez, who is going to the United Nations, called in our ambassador in Buenos Aires and said to him “The diplomatic channels are now closed”. That same Government refused the plea of the Security Council not to invade. That same Government refused the plea of President Reagan not to invade. That same Government invaded, and have been piling in soldiers and equipment, against the United Nations Security Council resolution, ever since. That is the kind of Government with whom we are dealing.

[column 282]

### **Q2. Mr. Thomas Cox**

asked the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 May.

### **The Prime Minister**

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

### **Mr. Cox**

Is the Prime Minister aware of the growing views now being expressed by the British people that there must be no escalation of military intervention—[*Interruption.*]—on the Falkland Islands issue? Against that background, is she prepared in the House today totally to repudiate those Conservative Members and the retired admirals and generals who now appear on television saying that, if need be, attacks must take place against the mainland of the Argentine? Is she aware that nothing would be more disastrous in trying to get a negotiated settlement through the United Nations than for that kind of action to be taken?

### **The Prime Minister**

The hon. Gentleman refers to “no escalation”. The escalation of the situation while negotiations were taking place was by the Argentine, in the invasion. There has been escalation ever since. In the meantime, our own British people remain on those islands under what I believe the Leader of the Opposition called in the first debate “foul and brutal aggression”. We must continue with our military activities——

### **Mr. Dalyell**

Answer the question.

### **The Prime Minister**

I am answering it. We must continue with our military activities. Again, it would be too easy to say “No military activities during negotiations”. What would happen? We should be hamstrung. The people would still remain under the heel of the invader, while the Argentines increased their activities on the mainland and increased their supplies and reserves in order to attack us at will.

### **Mr. Michael Hamilton**

If current peace proposals do not succeed, will my right hon. Friend take comfort from the fact that Army wives at Fulford camp have called for no compromise and have stressed only their wish to save the islanders?

### **The Prime Minister**

That is wonderful of them and I should be grateful if my hon. Friend would pass on that message. Everyone realises that the aggressor must not gain from his aggression. One hopes that the United Nations will be able to carry out the mandatory resolution that it passed. Mandatory resolutions under chapter 7 are comparatively rare in United Nations history. Unfortunately, those provisions have not been carried out. The important thing is that we should get the Argentines off the islands that they still occupy. If the United Nations cannot do that, and if negotiations cannot do that, we shall have to.