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15JUN82 – HoC. Presentación de Margaret Thatcher ante la House of Commons sobre la situación en Malvinas.

(Margaret Thatcher Foundation) (público Hansard HC 25/729-41)

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Margaret Thatcher

HC Stmt: [Falkland Islands]

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher)

With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the Falkland Islands.

Early this morning in Port Stanley, 74 days after the Falkland Islands were invaded, General Moore accepted from General Menendez the surrender of all the Argentine forces in East and West Falkland together with their arms and equipment. In a message to the Commander-in-Chief Fleet, General Moore reported:

“The Falkland Islands are once more under the Government desired by their inhabitants. God Save the Queen.”

General Menendez has surrendered some 11,000 men in Port Stanley and some 2,000 in West Falkland. In addition, we had already captured and were holding elsewhere on the islands 1,800 prisoners, making in all some 15,000 prisoners of war now in our hands.

The advance of our forces in the last few days is the culmination of a determined military effort to compel the Argentine Government to withdraw their forces from the Falkland Islands.

On the night of Friday 11 June, men of 42 and 45 Commandos and the 3rd Battalion the Parachute Regiment, supported by elements of the Royal Artillery and Royal Engineers, mounted an attack on Argentine positions on Mount Harriet, Two Sisters and Mount Longdon. They secured all their objectives, and during the next day consolidated their positions in the face of continuing resistance.

I regret to inform the House that five Royal Marines, 18 Paratroopers and two Royal Engineers lost their lives in those engagements. Their families are being informed. Seventy-two Marines and Paratroopers were wounded. We have no details of Argentine casualties. Hundreds of prisoners and large quantities of equipment were taken in these operations. The land operations were supported by Harrier attacks and naval gunfire from ships of the task force which made a major contribution to the success of our troops. In the course of the bombardment, however, HMS “Glamorgan” was hit by enemy fire. We now know that 13 of the crew died in this attack or are missing.

Throughout Sunday 13 June, the 3rd Commando Brigade maintained pressure on the enemy from its newly secured forward positions. Meanwhile, men of the 5th Infantry Brigade undertook reconnaissance missions in preparation for the next phase of the operations. HMS “Hermes” flew her one-thousandth Sea Harrier mission since leaving the United Kingdom.

The Argentines mounted two air raids that day. The first was turned back by Harriers of the task force before it could reach the Falklands. In the second raid A4 aircraft made an unsuccessful bombing run and one Mirage aircraft was shot down.

During the night of Sunday 13 June the second phase of the operations commenced. The 2nd Battalion the Parachute Regiment secured Wireless Ridge and the 2nd Battalion the Scots Guards took Tumbledown Mountain by first light on Monday 14 June. The 1st/7th Gurkhas advanced on Mount William, and the Welsh Guards on Sapper Hill. At 2 pm London time large numbers of Argentine troops were reported to be retreating from Mount William, Sapper Hill and Moody Brook in the direction of Port Stanley. [column 730]

British forces pressed forward to the outskirts of Port Stanley. Large numbers of Argentines threw down their weapons and surrendered.

At 4 o'clock the Argentine garrison indicated its willingness to talk. Orders were given to our forces to fire only in self-defence. Shortly before 5 o'clock a white flag appeared over Port Stanley.

Initial contact was made with the enemy by radio. By midnight General Moore and General Menendez were talking. The surrender of all the Argentine forces of East and West Falkland was agreed at 1 am today London time. Some of our forces are proceeding to West Falkland to organise the surrender of the Argentine forces there.

We are now tackling urgently the immense practical problems of dealing with the Argentine prisoners on the islands. The weather conditions are severe, permanent accommodation is very limited, and much of the temporary accommodation which we had hoped to use was lost when the “Atlantic Conveyor” was sunk on 25 May. We have already repatriated to Argentina almost 1,400 prisoners, and the further 15,000 now in our custody are substantially more than we had expected. With the help of the International Red Cross, we are taking urgent steps to safeguard these prisoners and hope to evacuate them as soon as possible from the islands, in accordance with our responsibilities under the Geneva Convention. This is a formidable task.

We have today sent to the Argentine Government, through the Swiss Government, a message seeking confirmation that Argentina, like Britain, considers all hostilities between us in the South Atlantic—and not only on the Islands themselves—to be at an end. It is important that this should be established with clarity and without delay.

We must now bring life in the islands back to normal as quickly as possible, despite the difficult conditions and the onset of the Antarctic winter. Mines must be removed; the water supply in Stanley is not working and there will be other urgent tasks of repair and reconstruction.

Mr. Rex Hunt and members of the Islands Council at present in this country will return as soon as possible. Mr. Hunt will concentrate on civilian matters. General Moore will be responsible for military matters. They will in effect act as civil and military commissioners and will, of course, work in the closest co-operation.

After all that has been suffered it is too early to look much beyond the beginning of the return to normal life. In due course the islanders will be able to consider and express their views about the future. When the time is right we can discuss with them ways of giving their elected representatives an expanded role in the government of the islands.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East)

The nominated ones?

The Prime Minister

We shall uphold our commitment to the security of the islands; if necessary, we shall do this alone. But I do not exclude the possibility of associating other countries with their security. Our purpose is that the Falkland Islands should never again be a victim of unprovoked aggression.

Recognising the need for economic development, I have asked Lord Shackleton to update his 1976 report on the economic potential of the islands. He has agreed to do this as a matter of urgency. I am most grateful to him. [column 731]

The House will join me, Mr. Speaker, in expressing our deep sense of loss over those who have died, and our sorrow for their families. The final details will not become clear for a few days yet, but we know that some 250 British Service men and civilians have been killed. They died that may live in freedom and justice.

The battle of the Falklands was a remarkable military operation, boldly planned, bravely executed, and brilliantly accomplished. We owe an enormous debt to the British forces and to the Merchant Marine. We honour them all. They have been supported by a people united in defence of our way of life and of our sovereign territory.

Mr. Michael Foot (Ebbw Vale)

The Opposition at once wish to join in the thanks and congratulations that the right hon. Lady has given to the Service men and their commanders on the way in which they have discharged their duties throughout these dangerous weeks. We wish that to be emphasised at the outset.

The relief that the House felt and expressed last night when it first heard the news derived partly from the belief that we had been able to avoid not merely the hideousness of a bloody battle at Port Stanley but also the consequences of such a battle. That sense of relief was rightly expressed, and we wish to express it once again.

Even so, as the right hon. Lady emphasised in her final remarks, there have been severe casualties for this country that affect some of our great naval ports such as Plymouth and Portsmouth. There have been severe casualties affecting other places as well. In addition, there have been severe casualties among the Argentine forces. I am sure that we are all concerned about them, too. However, the sense of relief is very great, and we are all grateful for the fact that the bloodshed is now coming to an end.

I hope that we shall have a further statement soon on the casualties when the right hon. Lady has received the further details to which she referred. In the meantime, we extend our deep sympathy to all the families who have suffered the consequences of the casualties and express our determination—I hope, the determination of the House of Commons—that proper ways should be found to assist those families and those who have been afflicted by what has happened.

I do not expect the right hon. Lady to deal now with questions about the future, nor do I think that this is the best time to do so. There is bound to be an interval during which we shall deal with the immediate position on the islands, and that interval is bound to mean that normal operations cannot be envisaged. However, it would be right for the right hon. Lady at an early date to express a view about the future. I do not say that she should describe the whole future, but she should give some commitments about it. In our view, it is not possible for the British Government to contemplate that over the years ahead they alone can deal with these matters.

The right hon. Lady said in her statement “I do not exclude the possibility of associating other countries with their security”. That is a modest statement of the requirement. I believe that she will have to go considerably further than that, in the interests of the islanders and of the security of the islands. I do not believe that it is possible for the Government to exclude much greater consultations with other countries. Indeed, we are bound to do so under the resolutions that we have signed. I therefore hope that the Prime Minister will now give an absolute assurance that we shall be prepared to consult [column 732] other nations according to our commitments under the United Nations charter to ensure that we provide for future arrangements.

I hope that we shall not exclude the possibility of the trusteeship that was discussed earlier. *[Interruption.]* Those hon. Members who wish to exclude that possibility ought to look at some of the changes in the Government's policy that have occurred during this period. The more they examine them, the more I believe that justice will be seen in the case that we have persistently put throughout these discussions.

Even if the Prime Minister will not give a detailed commitment now, I hope that she will say that she intends to carry out to the full, in the spirit and the letter, the resolution that she and her Government proposed at the United Nations in the name of this country. I do not know whether the right hon. Lady is shaking her head, but it would be a breach of faith if she were to abandon that commitment. I therefore hope that she will reiterate our allegiance on these questions.

All these matters will later have to be examined afresh, including the investigation of how the original crisis arose. Much the best course for the Government is to recognise the commitments that they have made in these international obligations and to say that they will uphold them as determinedly as we have upheld the rights of British territory.

The Prime Minister

I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for what he said about our Armed Forces. We mourn the loss of those who were killed and we are dedicated to the cause for which they gave their lives.

As to the United Nations resolution, the withdrawal by the Argentines was not honoured and our forces had to go there because they would not withdraw. Indeed, they had to recover and recapture British territory. I cannot agree with the right hon. Gentleman that those men risked their lives in any way to have a United Nations trusteeship. They risked their lives to defend British sovereign territory, the British way of life and the rights of British people to determine their own future.

Mr. David Steel (Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles)

Will the Prime Minister consider allowing the House a special opportunity to pay tribute to our forces after they have returned? I think that that would be appropriate.

Is the right hon. Lady aware that at lunch time the BBC carried allegedly authoritative reports about the form of inquiry in which she would invite the other party leaders to participate? However, she mentioned nothing about that in her statement. Without going into the form of that inquiry, will she give an undertaking that it will be strong enough to include not just the matters leading up to the invasion but such questions as the sale of arms to Argentina and the defence policy decisions that affect the equipment and operation of our Navy?

The Prime Minister

During Question Time, I referred to the form of inquiry and said that I would shortly be writing to Opposition leaders. I do not believe that the form of the inquiry should be anything like as wide as the right hon. Gentleman suggests, otherwise it would never report. I do not believe that it is the general wish to have the inquiry as wide as that. That is a totally different kind of review from the one on which I thought we were agreed. [column 733] However, I shall be writing shortly to the right hon. Gentleman about the matter. Surely today is a day for congratulation and celebration and not for post-mortems.

Several Hon. Members

rose—

Mr. Speaker

Order. Exceptionally, I propose to allow questions on the statement to continue for another half an hour, which will be a very good run for the House.

Mr. Edward du Cann (Taunton)

Is my right hon. Friend aware that the House and the nation will have noted with particular approval the sentence in her statement that indicated that we shall not again allow the Falkland Islands to be the subject of unprovoked aggression? In the meantime, is it not possible to say something about the local inhabitants of Port Stanley and West Falkland? I am sure that many people would be grateful for information on that subject.

The Prime Minister

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for what he said about defending the Falkland Islands so that they are never again the victim of aggression. At present, information about the civilian population is sketchy because of appalling weather and the fact that there were only a few hours of daylight before I came to the House. Initial indications are that the islanders are thrilled to see our forces and that in general they are safe and well, but we have no further details.

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (Down, South)

Will the Government be careful to ensure that nothing is done or said in the coming days that could be an obstacle to our securing, both in the Falkland Islands and in Britain, compensation and satisfaction for the loss and damage that have been suffered as a result of this unprovoked aggression?

The Prime Minister

I shall try to refrain from saying anything that will prejudice that, but I must point out that we are not seeking compensation. We went to recapture the islands, to restore British sovereignty, which had not been lost because of the invasion, and to restore British administration. That was our objective, and I believe that we have achieved it.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport)

I wish to express our congratulations to the right hon. Lady and sympathy to the relatives of those who were killed. Will the Prime Minister confirm that it is not the intention to return all the Argentine military until Argentina has confirmed that all hostilities in the South Atlantic have ended? When considering the association that might be developed with other countries for the long-term development of the Falkland Islands, and before making any final decision—it is too early to reach a firm conclusion about how we should handle the future—will the right hon. Lady consult the United States of America, which has been one of our most loyal allies and which has great interest in the Organisation of American States?

The Prime Minister

It was precisely because we believed that we should not return all the prisoners of war until we were certain that we had achieved a cessation of hostilities with the mainland of Argentina that I said that “we hope” to evacuate the prisoners of war. We must send back a considerable number, but we should withhold some, especially the officers and commanders, until we have achieved a ceasefire with the mainland. [column 734]

As to the long-term future, as the right hon. Gentleman said, we are talking about British sovereign territory and British people. Many people will be interested in the future of the islands, but we must consult the people and then make the best possible arrangements that we can for them. I recognise that that will need the friendliness of other States in the region. It would not be wise to go beyond that now.

Sir John Eden (Bournemouth, West)

Following the successful outcome of the campaign, which would not have been possible without the supreme valour displayed by our forces nor without the steady and resolute leadership shown from the start by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, will she say whether, in attempting to tackle some of the enormous and immediate logistical problems, especially the shortage of water, it would be practicable to turn to Uruguay, Chile or other Latin American countries for help?

The Prime Minister

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. We wish to have help with the logistical problems from wherever we can get it, but few places are near and therefore we had to prepare for some of those matters in the supplies and provisions that we sent down with the task force. We shall be all right for water. If we cannot return some prisoners, we shall need some help with food and transport, but I believe that the United States of America will be prepared to help with some of those matters.

Mr. Tony Benn (Bristol, South-East)

Apart from the inquiry, will the Prime Minister publish the full text of all the exchanges that took place with the United Nations, Argentina and the Americans so that we may see what happened and a full analysis of the costs in life, equipment and money in this tragic and unnecessary war, which the world knows very well will not provide an answer to the problem of the future of the Falkland Islands? Does she agree that in the end there must be negotiations, and will she say with whom and when she will be ready to enter into such negotiations?

The Prime Minister

The texts of all the negotiations are not mine to publish. We entered into the negotiations in confidence and I do not believe in breaking a confidence. I do not intend to negotiate on the sovereignty of the islands in any way, except with those who live there. That is my fervent belief. The right hon. Gentleman called it an unnecessary war. Tragic it may have been, but may I point out to him that he would not enjoy the freedom of speech that he put to such excellent use unless people had been prepared to fight for it.

Mr. Churchill (Stretford)

Is my right hon. Friend aware that the nation owes this signal victory not only to the skill and courage of British forces but to her resolute leadership during the critical weeks? Is she further aware that the entire House will wish to be associated with the tribute that she paid to those who will not return from the South Atlantic? Will she associate us with her condolences to the families of those involved, whose grief the entire nation shares?

The Prime Minister

I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Every hon. Member would wish to pay tribute to those who lost their lives, to those who have been injured and to the families without whose support they could never have done such a wonderful job.

[column 735]

Mr. Michael English (Nottingham, West)

Now that the war is almost over, will the right hon. Lady invite *The Times* to purchase the copyright of Oriana Fallaci's splendid interview with General Galtieri? It would be some recompense if *The Times* made such a purchase and presented the copyright to the British Government, because, after all, it took money from the Argentines to print 7,000 words of Argentine propaganda before most of our fellow citizens died.

The Prime Minister

That is not a matter for me. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's message will have been heard by those who are in possession of the copyright. I can say only that it was a remarkable interview by a very remarkable journalist.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North)

Both I and the people of Northern Ireland salute the memory of those who gave their lives in defence of sovereign British territory and of freedom. I wish to remind the Prime Minister that at Question Time a few weeks ago I asked whether she abided by two principles—first, the right to defend sovereign British territory and, secondly, the upholding of the wishes of those who live in that territory. I congratulate her on the fact that in this instance she has been guided by those two principles, but I remind her that yesterday—[Hon. Members: “Question” .]—Ulster mourned its dead as another young police officer was carried to his grave in the same fight for freedom. I urge the Prime Minister to tell Mr. Haughey that the sovereignty of Northern Ireland cannot be challenged by him or by anyone else and that the majority of Ulster people will be allowed to decide their destiny.

The Prime Minister

I believe in both the principles enunciated by the hon. Gentleman. We shall continue to uphold them and I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all the security forces, the police, the Armed Forces and the Ulster Defence Regiment, who have done wonderful things in Northern Ireland and who are upholding the law and liberties in the same way as those who went to the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South)

I appreciate the Prime Minister's comments and satisfaction today, but does she agree with the view of Secretary Haig that a strictly military outcome cannot endure for all time?

The Prime Minister

I am a little at a loss about the question. We went to recapture what was ours. We had to do it by military means because the Argentines would not leave peacefully. We condemned their military adventurism. We were perfectly right to repossess what was already ours and to look after and defend British subjects. That is not a military solution. That is repossessing what we should never have lost.

Sir Bernard Braine (Essex, South-East)

Leaving aside Gibraltar, where independence is specifically ruled out by the Treaty of Utrecht, is not it not the case that the option open to every British dependency since the war has been independence within the Commonwealth? That is enshrined in the United Nations charter and there is nothing in the charter about size and population. Therefore, will my right hon. Friend say whether, if the islanders choose independence, the British Government will be prepared, on their own, or with whatever friends [column 736]they can muster, to provide the necessary guarantees so that people nurtured in the British traditions of democracy and self-fulfilment may have it?

The Prime Minister

There are probably three choices within the British Commonwealth—independence, associated status, or self-government. A territory with as small a population as the Falklands would have to have its security guaranteed, whichever of the three it wished to follow. I think that it is too early to say what the islanders would wish to do. We shall discuss with them under what I would call the ordinary British right of self-determination.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton)

Now that the hostilities are over, and we know how many of the British forces gave their lives in repossessing the Falkland Islands, will the Prime Minister consider the views of their relations about bringing the bodies back to Britain for burial, especially in the light of the distressing sight, for relations, of the inevitable mass burial at Goose Green and Darwin shown on television last night? If the relatives wish the bodies to be returned to the United Kingdom, will she be prepared to arrange for that?

The Prime Minister

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the way in which he has raised this subject, and for his realisation that immediate burial is inevitable. Afterwards, under the normal traditional rules, these people receive a burial, usually locally, and the graves are looked after in perpetuity by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Before we decide what should be done in the case of deaths in the Falklands, we shall be considering the views of the relatives.

Mr. John Farr (Harborough)

Apart from my expression of admiration for the sacrifices of the three Services, may I ask right hon. Friend whether she can confirm the tremendous price paid by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary? The three Armed Services are frequently mentioned, but the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, through “Sir Tristram” and “Sir Galahad”, as two examples, has paid a tremendous price. What it has done for the country should be recognised from the top.

The Prime Minister

The Royal Fleet Auxiliary paid a tremendous price, but neither my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Farr) nor I would wish to single out any particular sacrifice. Each and every one contributed to the successful accomplishment of our objectives. We mourn each and every one in the same way as any other.

Mr. George Foulkes (South Ayrshire)

Apart from the appalling loss of life, can the Prime Minister tell us how and when the Government propose to tell the House of the full cost of the operation, the cost of garrisoning and maintaining the islands in perpetuity, and what increases in taxes or cuts in social and other services will be necessary to pay for all these costs?

The Prime Minister

Of course we shall tell the House. Under the ordinary rules of Supply expenditure, we shall have to tell the House. I hope that the hon. Member thinks that the money spent is worthwhile.

Mr. Keith Speed (Ashford)

Can my right hon. Friend tell the House whether the arrangements for the Argentine surrender include the surrender of the Argentine mission on Southern Thule, in the South Sandwich group, which [column 737] has been illegally occupied by Argentine troops since 1976? As I learnt when I was in the Falkland Islands, that is a source of continuing concern to the people who live there.

The Prime Minister

We would wish to arrange for the surrender of not only the Argentines in the Falkland Islands but any Argentines left on the dependencies as well, including Southern Thule.

Mr. Frank Allaun (Salford, East)

As the Prime Minister has told an American television audience that she will retain aircraft, Rapiers, submarines and ships in the South Atlantic, will she make some estimate, for our benefit, of how that will be paid for by the British people?

The Prime Minister

If necessary, we have to defend the Falkland Islands alone. We are talking about the lives of British subjects who expect to have the same rights as those that we enjoy. I do not believe that the hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Allaun) would wish them to have any less. It will mean allocating some of our defence equipment to that region, but the NATO defences are not wholly exclusive in the sense that the defence of NATO is affected by what goes on beyond its borders. I should be amazed if the hon. Gentleman, who also makes good use of his freedom, would begrudge the cash necessary, and thereby deny it to those people.

Mr. Alan Clark (Plymouth, Sutton)

Did the Prime Minister note the comment of a captain in the 2nd Parachute Battalion after the liberation of Goose Green that we were fighting not for principles but for people? Does my right hon. Friend agree that those who have sacrificed their lives in these battles, besides the brilliant achievements, to which tribute has already been paid, made that sacrifice—this is a source of pride to the whole country—so that British families shall be delivered from oppression no matter how far away or how few in number they may be?

The Prime Minister

We do our best to uphold the beliefs spoken of by my hon. Friend. I agree with the person who said in Goose Green that we were fighting for people, but people must have principles by which to live. They have to be governed by fair principles because liberty and justice are the only things that give life its dignity and meaning. We shall try to uphold those on the part of our citizens wherever they look to us for their defence.

Mr. Stanley Cohen (Leeds, South-East)

Does the Prime Minister agree about the insensitivity of the statement made—I am not sure who made it—about burial in a mass grave of 21 of those who died in the Falklands? Does she also agree that, even if the bodies are reburied dirty, some assistance should be given to the families of those Service men who died there, bearing in mind that the families have 8,000 miles to travel if they want to pay tribute to their relatives who have died in this conflict?

The Prime Minister

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that point. If those Service men find their permanent resting place in the Falklands in a Commonwealth grave, it is customary to pay for the families to go to see the grave.

[column 738]

Sir Anthony Royle (Richmond, Surrey)

Can my right hon. Friend give an assurance that arrangements will be made to look after the families of the Chinese citizens from Hong Kong who were killed in the attack at Bluff Cove?

The Prime Minister

I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point. We recognise that we also have a duty to those people, because they died in serving our cause. We shall make arrangements accordingly.

Mr. Sydney Bidwell (Ealing, Southall)

Does the Prime Minister's statement today mean that under her kind of leadership in the future there will be no participatory role for a saner and more civilised Argentine Government in any international system for guaranteeing the peace in that part of the South Atlantic? Is it not unrealistic, in view of the geographical factors, to think that we can carry on as a colonial Power on those distant shores?

The Prime Minister

This is British sovereign territory.

Mr. Bidwell

We know that.

The Prime Minister

I know that the hon. Gentleman knows that. I am amazed at how he manages to ignore it in his every question. This is British sovereign territory and they are British people. We need the friendliness of neighbouring States. We do not negotiate sovereignty with them.

Sir David Price (Eastleigh)

Does my right hon. Friend agree that resolution 502 of the Security Council was implemented not by the United Nations but by the valour and courage of Her Majesty's Forces and by the determination of my right hon. Friend herself? Is there not a lesson there for the whole House to learn?

The Prime Minister

I agree wholly with what my hon. Friend has said. No attempt was made by the Argentines to implement resolution 502.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough)

Will the Prime Minister not close her mind completely to some discussion, under the auspices of the United Nations, on the ultimate sovereignty of the islands? Is it not a profound anachronism in 1982 for any State to have sovereign territory 8,000 miles away? Did the Prime Minister weigh the question of sovereignty when, together with the United States of America, she cleared out 1,400 people—who were not given the chance to say a word—from Diego Garcia to make it into a nuclear base? Is it not a fact that the new Government in Mauritius are demanding that the Americans get off that island and that the 1,400 people return? Is not the question of sovereignty at the basis of all that? Does it not have the seeds of future conflict if we do not act democratically? What would the right hon. Lady say if a powerful Argentina had taken the Shetland Islands? Would we tolerate that?

The Prime Minister

There is one principle—that territorial sovereignty be respected.

Mr. Flannery

Not in Diego Garcia.

The Prime Minister

Diego Garcia was taken by arrangement with Mauritius. A sum of £3 million in compensation was taken by arrangement and agreement, fully in accordance with the law. We either uphold territorial sovereignty and international law or we have international anarchy.

[column 739]

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton)

Does my right hon. Friend realise that nobody in the House could rise to speak without paying tribute to probably the greatest victory in the history of an army at the end of an 8,000 mile supply line? That achievement is unbelievable. Will my right hon. Friend make it clear that she will resist the siren voices of politicians on both sides of the House or among the media, and that she will make no further statement about the future of the Falkland Islands for at least six months? The dust must be allowed to settle. We must get the people back there. Let us not have the Government permanently being asked what they are doing about the future of the islands. There must be peace there first.

The Prime Minister

I agree with my hon. Friend that this was a great military victory that will go down in the history books. I believe that the brilliance with which it was planned and executed is unequalled. It will take some considerable time for the islanders to settle down, for us to see what development possibilities there are, and to get security for the Falkland Islands. I believe that it will take at least six months. I should not be surprised if it took a good deal longer.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North)

Since this country had the support of most international opinion in resisting aggression, is it not equally important to keep the same support on the question of the future of the Falkland Islands? Why is the Prime Minister ruling out completely the possibility of United Nations trusteeship? Can there be no change in the territorial status of the Falkland Islands?

The Prime Minister

The only change in the territorial status of the Falkland Islands that one would consider would be one arranged in conjunction and discussion with the people of the Falkland Islands. That is the way that we have gone about looking after those many territories and colonies that have previously been within our own trusteeship. I believe that that is the way that we should continue to act.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton)

Will full provision be made from public funds for those who have lost their homes, their stock-in-trade and their personal possessions in the conflict in a more full and generous manner than the war damage compensation—to which the Falkland Islanders contributed generously in taxation during the war—was paid to persons in the United Kingdom who lost their homes or property through enemy action?

The Prime Minister

May I look at that question, Mr. Speaker, before answering? I am not certain what insurance arrangements were made by the Falkland Islanders and how they would operate in conjunction with war damage. It is our intention to be generous in these matters.

Mr. Robert C. Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, West)

I have not heard anything about the Gurkhas. Can the Prime Minister tell us whether any of them lost their lives or were wounded? Will we treat the Gurkhas, who serve for less pay than our men, as generously as we shall treat our own people?

The Prime Minister

I mentioned the Gurkhas. The 1st/7th Gurkhas advanced on Mount William and played a prominent part in the final, crucial stages of the battle. [column 740]We do not yet have full casualty lists, and that is why I have not been able to give the figures. I gladly pay full tribute to those excellent fighting men the Gurkhas.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Edinburgh, West)

Will my right hon. Friend consider requesting the Government of the United States of America to assist with the return of Argentine prisoners of war to Argentina in view of the enormous numbers involved?

The Prime Minister

We shall have to get help if necessary. First, I want to know whether we can achieve a full cessation of hostilities with the mainland. We have a number of our own ships there. I believe that we could possibly get some of them back faster in our own ships than we could by either chartering ships or securing ships from other nations because of the time that it would take to get there. We might require help with something like Hercules aircraft.

Mr. Alfred Dubs (Battersea, South)

Can the Prime Minister say whether, since the Argentine invasion, the British Government requested from the American Government, on a purchase or lease basis, some of the aerial reconnaissance aircraft, the AWACS?

The Prime Minister

I do not give details of help received from the Government of the United States of America. I can say only that it has been splendid. I believe that we have had everything that we have asked for. AWACS aircraft need somewhere to land, and we do not have anywhere.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield)

Does my right hon. Friend accept that the task force, the Services and our maritime marine have proved themselves to be the finest and the most professional in the world as well as being the most compassionate, that her leadership has inspired our nation and that her assurance about the long-term security of the Falkland Islands is much appreciated because of the growing strategic importance of that area to the peace of the world?

The Prime Minister

I agree with my hon. Friend that the Falkland Islands have a strategic importance, not only in shipping terms because of the shipping lanes but because they are the entrance to the Antarctic, which I believe will become more important. I agree with my hon. Friend about our Armed Forces. Their professionalism has been remarked upon wherever they serve in the world.

Mr. Foot

Will fresh representations now be made about the three British journalists who were detained at the beginning of the incident? They were engaged in carrying out their proper duties. There may also be some British prisoners who will be part of the discussions. In the light of the right hon. Lady's replies about resolution 502 and any participation of the United Nations, is it not a fact that, despite the great military achievement—everybody acknowledges that—we had considerable international support, both from the United States of America and from other countries, at the United Nations and in practical terms?

Were we not glad enough to have that support when we were dealing with some of the problems? Does not the Prime Minister recognise that that international support could be needed in future? Does she accept that we shall have to go to the United Nations and argue our case in the [column 741]coming months? Is she not, therefore, unwise to resist that approach to the problem? She will have to return to it in the end, and she might as well acknowledge that now.

The Prime Minister

I have no further news about the three journalists. Representations are made through the Swiss embassy, which represents our interests in Argentina. We shall, of course, make fresh inquiries. There are also a few of our British prisoners of war. We hope that they will be returned, as we have returned so many Argentine prisoners of war. The earlier prisoners from the Falklands were repatriated to this country.

I repeat that resolution 502 was not honoured by the Argentines. We have had to secure the withdrawal without resolution 502. Because it was not honoured, we do not need to negotiate in any way with the United Nations or anyone else about British sovereignty of the islands. I make that absolutely clear. For years, under the non-self-governing territories article of the United Nations charter, we have reported about the increasing provision for representation of the people in the government of their own territory. That we shall continue to do.

Mr. Foot

The right hon. Lady will have to speak in a different tone if she is to have any successful discussions in New York and elsewhere in the coming months. The right hon. Lady continues to miss the point about resolution 502. Partly because of the passage of that resolution, we received material military and other support from the Americans. Partly because of the passage of that resolution, we obtained economic support from elsewhere. For the right hon. Lady to suggest that she does not need international support to solve the problem is an absurdity and will be proved to be so in the months ahead.

The Prime Minister

As I did not say that, will the right hon. Gentleman kindly withdraw his remarks?