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Margaret Thatcher

Radio Interview for BBC Radio 2 *Jimmy Young Programme*

Jimmy Young

Prime Minister, Good Morning.

PM

Good Morning.

JY

Now Argentina's reaction to Britain's latest round of peace proposals, as we have heard, have been handed to Britain's Ambassador to the United Nations, who will now report to you. Now have you had a chance yet to study the reply? Does it contain anything new do you think which could be developed by our negotiators?

PM

Well, the news wasn't quite right. We haven't actually had the reply. We have had just a preliminary indication from our Sir Anthony Parsons Ambassador in New York and we will await the full reply. It has to be translated, it has to be transmitted and then obviously we have to study it. But from the indications that were given to him I am afraid it doesn't look very encouraging. But we must wait for the whole thing.

JY

Now I was talking to Mr. Healey yesterday on this programme and he said, and I quote from the transcript of what he said, "we don't know for certain the state of negotiations or precisely what the Government is asking for and what are the issues on which they are prepared to negotiate". I just wondered if you could clarify what are the essential demands that you are making and what are the things on which you wouldn't want to give way, or wouldn't give way.

PM

I wonder if I can describe it like this. First the Argentine forces have to leave the Islands. Then we have to have someone to verify the withdrawal and then we have to have a period during which we enter into negotiations. Now, I think the important thing is that during that period the people on the Islands must be allowed to live the life to which they have been used. They have their own democratic institutions, of course they do, we're a democracy. They have their own law and during that interim period we must not have any attempt so to change the life of the Islanders that it would lead inevitably to a great influx of Argentinians and lead inevitably to a transfer of sovereignty. So we have to arrange that interim period so that it doesn't prejudge the final outcome. Because that is still a matter for negotiation. And of course, you know, don't [end p1] think necessarily that it's only British sovereignty which we still have or Argentine sovereignty. We, after all, are experts at de-colonisation, genuine de-colonisation, and bringing people to independence. And in our view, it is the interests and wishes of the Islanders which really are the most important thing.

JY

Would it be true to say that there are three main points on this: sovereignty, the rights of the Islanders to self-determination, and perhaps the need to show that what you have described as "naked armed aggression" just doesn't pay?

PM

I think first the Argentine troops have to leave the Islands. They were the invaders. If they are allowed to stay, there will be many other countries who will look and say "Ah, Ah, look you can take someone else's territory by force and it doesn't matter what United Nations Resolutions there are, no-one will actually put the invader off." I entirely agree. Invasion must not be seen to pay. Otherwise we shall have all sorts of boundaries changed by force and you'll get a kind of international anarchy. That matters, of course it does. Also those Falkland Islanders are British people. You know there are only forty Argentinians in that Island and not all of them permanent residents. They are British people—some of them have been there far longer than some of their counterparts in Argentina. The families have been there far longer.

JY

Dealing with the matter of self-determination for a moment, I was talking on the programme on Monday to David Steel, and he said, (PM interrupted with "you have everyone here, don't you") Yes we have rather, and I have only been back since Monday. We were talking about a major long-term commitment to safeguard the security and democracy of the Islanders and he said, on Monday, "clearly that is not going to be possible, because you would have to have more troops on the Island than citizens, so military confidence doesn't actually provide a long-term solution". Would it be fair to say that at some stage you are going to have to make a decision on what is right in principle and what perhaps is achievable in practice?

PM

Yes you only need, really, to have a contingency to defend the Islands because you have got an invader close by. And really the [end p2] United Nations should deal with these matters. You see there are many other small islands which we have brought to independence—Vanuatu—5,000 people—they don't all have to have great garrisons to defend them. There is certainly one in Central America—Belize—that we brought to independence, it's still got a garrison of ours there because it could be threatened by Guatemala. But certainly there would have to be some arrangement to protect the integrity of these Islands. To protect their right to live their own way of life. I doubt very much whether there will be another rapid invasion if we succeed in dealing with this one properly, with the Argentinians leaving the Islands. But you are quite right. Independence must be protected, with the right of the people to live their own lives in their own way.

JY

What seems to worry some people is that by giving the Islanders the right of absolute determination you are, I don't mean you are, they are being given a right of veto. In fact one MP said yesterday that you would be giving 1,800 people more power than the 55 million people living in these islands of ours.

PM

But how absurd. I am only here in the capacity for which I am here this morning because our people have the right of self-determination. Just let's get it right. This is what democracy is all about. Are those people who say that really going to say to you that we're going to hand over those people to live under a military dictatorship? I think it's absolutely disgraceful if they are.

JY

Right. Now you mentioned the United Nations yourself just now. Would you be willing to see some sort of administration which would involve the United Nations?

PM

Oh yes. United Nations administration is one thing which certainly could be done particularly in the interim while we actually are doing longer negotiations. Certainly. And United Nations administration I believe would be carried out with great integrity. I would like to say that I think that we are all lucky to have Mr. de Cuellar as Secretary General. He is a person himself of great integrity and it so happens we have a special relationship with him, if I could just use that phrase, because you know he was head of the United Nations observers when we were doing the elections in Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe. So he knows how we bring colonies to independence. [end p3] He knows how we arrange things with free elections. He knows that we believe in self-determination and he has seen us at it. So we have special faith in him.

JY

That brings us really back to sovereignty again. Now last Thursday Mr. Pym told the House that the Government were willing to discuss sovereignty, as one of the factors in the long-term solution to the problem. But on Sunday Mr. Nott, when he was asked whether he envisaged the Falkland Islands becoming Argentine sovereign territory, said "No, never". So which of those positions are we adopting?

PM

Isn't it difficult when questions are asked by you at the end of a programme? Self-determination by very definition means that you are willing to discuss sovereignty because you are willing to hand over sovereignty to the people of that territory. And you are willing to consult them with regard to what their wishes are. So certainly in that sense we have after all given up sovereignty of many many countries which are today independent. That is what it means, "coming from an Empire to a Commonwealth".

JY

But you are talking of being willing to give sovereignty to the Falkland Islanders and not being willing to give sovereignty to the Argentinians.

PM

If the Falkland Islanders said "look, we want an arrangement with Argentina" and that was the wishes of the Falkland Islanders, that also we would have to consider, that again is what self-determination and consulting the people is. I mean, here, all the power which I have, comes from the people. If they were to say that. I personally think that after they have had this terrible experience of invasion the last thing they will want to do is to have close association with the Argentinians. It's just like the Channel Islands during the last war. They wouldn't easily have invited the Germans back.

JY

But, you see, where do you then go on the question of sovereignty? Are we still at an impasse as far as the Argentines are concerned?

PM

All the negotiations have yet to come. And even if we settled the arrangements, the negotiations that we are now involved upon, all that we are doing is having an interim arrangement which does [end p4] not prejudge the outcome and all the talks have yet to take place. But, of course, there an enormous gap opens up between ourselves and the Argentinians. We are a democratic country. We believe that power and strength comes from the people. They are a dictatorship. And of course this is a tremendous gap. I mean, they say “look, who determines the interests of the people, the Government determines the interests of the people.” We say “but don't you think the people ought to have some say in their future?”

JY

I certainly don't want to put words in your mouth, nor would you allow me to do so, but could I take it that you are coming down on the side of Mr. Nott who is saying that he could never visualise that the Falklands could become Argentine territory, but you are saying unless the Islanders would agree?

PM

Unless the Islanders wish to have it, or wish to have some sort of arrangement with the Argentinians. There was an agreement in 1971 which gave much greater communications to the Islands between Argentina and the Falklands and there is a regular sea service and a regular air service. And the Argentines laid those on, which is why there are probably now thirty or forty Argentinians in the Islands. And I personally think that once you invade you put all of those things which were working reasonably well and in a reasonably friendly way with the people, because you know from one people to another things are much more friendly sometimes than they are with the Junta—you put those arrangements at risk.

JY

You thought the Islanders wouldn't want to join up with the Argentines. Funnily enough, Mr. Pym said the other day the Islanders will need to consider their position, this was after the traumatic events of the invasion and so on, and their wishes for the future might not be the same as before. Which I suppose some might read to mean they perhaps would like to come to some accommodation with the Argentines.

PM

What we say is that we have to consult the Islanders. And the experience they have gone through is a factor which undoubtedly will influence their views. I doubt very much whether it would influence them towards Argentinian sovereignty. I mean just look at what they have experienced, just look at some of the allegations that have been made about Captain Astizone of the people we are holding as a prisoner of war. The Swedish and the French want to question him. [end p5] And that is the kind of regime that we are dealing with. There is one thing. You see we were trying to talk with the Argentinians and we did have negotiations before all this broke out, and they didn't want negotiations, they wanted invasion. But it only makes sense to say “Look, couldn't we both join in in developing the oil that may be there or the chemicals?” That would be to their advantage and it would be to the advantage of our people on the Falkland Islands. Now what we are trying to do is to get more of those joint enterprises going. But you could do that actually without affecting sovereignty.

JY

I know, but the further we go, we still seem to come back to this sticky issue.

PM

Yes, but only because, only because, if I may say so, the Argentinians invaded to get sovereignty. And what they are trying to do is to say, “We will only leave provided we keep sovereignty”. That is like a burglar saying, “I'll only leave your house if I can take everything I have stolen with me”.

JY

Well, the only thing I would say Prime Minister, it is a very grey area; because I have just come back from America and even President Reagan in a newspaper statement today, which I have got on the other side of the studio, said “The Argentinians do have some kind of a claim to the Islands.” It's true to say that he went on to say that they shouldn't have exercised force to get it, but he did say that they have some kind of a claim.

PM

Well, now look. What is not a grey area is this. Sovereignty at the moment is ours. It has not been changed by invasion. And sovereignty must never be changed by invasion. That's point number one. Number two—we believe in the right of people to democracy and therefore they must have an enormous say in their own future. Point number three—if this invasion succeeds there will be very many people the world over who are at risk. Now it's Britain who stands up for democracy. It's Britain who stands up for the international rule of law and it's Britain that says, “Enough is enough, this must be made to stop”. None of that is a grey area. It is Britain who three or four times took the argument about the sovereignty of the dependancies to the International Court of Justice. The Argentinians refused to go. The Court therefore cannot pronounce unless both sides agree. The Argentinians have had a dispute with [end p6] the Chileans over the Beagle Channel for years. They can't even sort that out. That has been to a Court. They agreed to arbitration. They did not like the results of arbitration. So the Argentinians refused to agree to it. The Pope

tried to mediate—he didn't get anywhere. The Argentinians—let me just have one final say Jimmy, I know you are anxious to come in—they have had one tactic throughout all of these disputes. If they don't like the answer their tactic is confuse and delay.

JY

What everyone is trying to find, and you probably most of all, is something which will avoid people shooting each other. Could I take you back to 1980?

PM

That would be easy. They should withdraw from the Islands and that would avoid any more shooting.

JY

Well, could you hold on a second Prime Minister? David Steel said, again on the programme the other day, that in 1980 the Government made it quite clear that they were willing to exchange the title of sovereignty in return for a long lease which would include certain safeguards for the Islanders. Now as far as you're concerned, providing the United Nations were perhaps involved as well, would that be an acceptable solution?

PM

No, we put that to the people of the Islands. If there were ever any suggestions—I mean we have a lease in Hong Kong of part of the territory. Therefore one said to the people, “Look, would it be all right, or would you like it, if one proposed to the Argentinians, say a lease,—it could be 99 years, it could be 250 years,—but to give you many many generations under British administration, but with a final reversion?” The Islanders said “No, not what we want at all.” So that was never never never put to the Argentinians in pursuit of our fundamental principle—the Islanders didn't want it.

JY

So we come back to this veto in the end, don't we?

PM

I don't like the use of the word veto. You come back to the heritage of British born people.

JY

But it's a veto just the same. [end p7]

PM

No, it is a right.

JY

Under veto. Well, it means the same thing ...

PM

Let me say this, the people of Britain have a veto on my being Prime Minister. They know they have a right to elect the people of their choice. I don't like the use of the word veto.

JY

Whatever deal you do with the Argentinians—let's say for instance you did a deal which makes it all go nicely away and the Islanders said, “But we don't want that.” That is their right and that's the end of the matter. Out of the window goes your deal.

PM

I won't do a deal with the Argentinians without consulting with the people. And I would be false to everything that Britain stands for if I were to contemplate such a deal. That is not what being British means.

JY

Can I ask you about the American side of this?

PM

I suspect Mr. Steel would call that jingoism. Well, so be it. I am proud of being British. It does stand for liberty and justice. Those are the things that I believe in and those are the things that I shall continue to try to extend.

JY

What about the view, and Mr. Healey has expressed this as well, that if negotiations fail and we begin what (as he said the Task Force commanders want) could be, and let's hope it isn't, could be a long and bloody campaign; we might then be throwing Latin America into the arms of the Soviets? Do you think that's a point of legitimate concern?

PM

No, I don't think so. There are two things there. Let's take them because you put two things in one question. The idea that we have absolutely no military activity unless negotiations fail is patently wrong. The raid on Pebble Island was a tremendous success. A Commando raid on Pebble Island—a colossal success. We haven't just been sitting back waiting for negotiations, that would be only too easy a ploy for the Argentinians, and there are signs that that's what they're trying to do: saying, “All right brothers, don't you do anything while we negotiate and then you can rely on us to carry on the negotiations while your people are having a pretty difficult time of [end p8] it in the South Atlantic”. So we're not going to be trapped by that one. So his suggestion that you can't do anything while there are negotiations is patently wrong. We've been carrying on doing what we believe is best and you've seen many of the results. Now what was the second one—shall we throw the whole of Latin America into the arms of the Soviets? What, merely by standing up for the rights of British people? Do you know Jimmy, I believe that we eventually shall succeed and the Argentines will leave. Do you know, the whole of the democratic world will rejoice. Thank goodness someone has stood up for people who are loyal to them and have stood up for democratic principles.

JY

Well, I have to tell you, and I am sure I don't need to tell you, because you know anyway, but there is certainly great concern in America about South America. Indeed, I interviewed United States Senator Larry Presler on the programme quite recently. He said the Americans are obsessed with the threat of Communism in South America.

PM

Well, if you look at Argentina, Argentines have already done quite a bit of tucking up with the Soviets as far as trade is concerned. You know full well that after Afghanistan the Americans put a grain embargo on sales to Soviet Union. What happened? The wheat was sold to the Soviet Union by the Argentines. Wheat and beef and 80 per cent of their food exports now go to the Soviet Union. So they have already got a very considerable relationship with the Soviet Union in food and that gives them a terrific balance of payments as far as the Russians are concerned. And what can the Russians supply then with? Not very much save arms, so they have already got that. There already is, and the United States is very much aware of, the Peronistas, whose whole thesis is very similar to that of the Soviet Union and who use similar tactics. That is there already, but I do not believe that if you talk about the whole of Latin America, what Britain is doing by standing up for British people in the Falklands, and by standing up for international law, will throw South America into the hands of the Soviets. Rather they will see Britain, and the Western world too, stands up for her own democracies; and they will see it as a strengthening of democracy.

I guess there are many many people in the Argentine who would love to have the rights that we have in Britain. Because don't forget Galtieri invaded to try to distract the tension from the great dissatisfaction [end p9] of the people with his own Government.

JY

Can I now ask you about something which concerns the Falklands but is a bit nearer to home? Now it is a very difficult time for you, for the whole Government; it must be very disappointing for you to have another crisis on your hands. This time the Agriculture Ministers rejection of the British position on the farm prices agreement. Were you very taken aback or very shocked by that?

PM

It is very serious. I didn't think they would do that because there has been an understanding every since 1966, since long before we went into the Community, that anything of major concern in the Common Market, the decisions were only taken by unanimous agreement among all the countries. Indeed that was put into the White Paper which we debated in the House before we went in. There is a phrase which says that all the countries concerned recognise that an attempt to impose a majority view in a case where one or more Members considered their vital interests to be at stake, would imperil the very fabric of the Community; and I did not think they would do this. And I think it undermines one's confidence to some extent in our partners in Europe. No Head of Government warned me that they were going to do this in any way. It was part of the arrangement when we went in that things that were of vital interest to any particular country would only be decided unanimously. It is serious—because it is so serious we have to consider it very carefully and not dash in to a reaction—because it matters to the world that we have a stable area in Europe and, after all, let me put it this way, Europe owes a great deal to Britain and I hope she will not forget it.

JY

Just before you came in Prime Minister I interviewed Geoffrey Rippon on exactly the same thing and he described it as “the greatest crisis since we joined the EEC”. Would you agree with that? [end p10]

PM

Yes, I think it is because it is on the fundamental principle. You see the irony is, it was the French, it was De Gaulle, who insisted on having what is called the Luxembourg Compromise, which says that, no, you can't go ahead unless it is unanimous: but it was they who were one of the countries who voted to overturn it. Again without any warning to me at all.

JY

Prime Minister, can I ask you how long ...

PM

... but I was disappointed. I was very disappointed. I didn't think they would do that.

JY

Can I ask you how long you can spare me? How long you can stay to?

PM

I've got four-and-a-half more minutes.

JY

Then we won't have any music until after 4½ minutes.

PM

You are depriving the people of music.

JY

Now, coming back to the Falklands as such, Enoch Powell has said the purpose of the Task Force is to restore British rule and anything less than restoration of British rule will be an Argentine triumph and a British defeat. Do you think that is an extreme view, or is it one with which you could align yourselves?

PM

I can understand the whole of the House of Commons right at the beginning wanted—realising we have sovereignty—wanted the full restoration of British administration and that could well be the result of the final negotiations. We must have an interim period. What I call the democratic part of the constitution of the Falklands. Now there is one question that I had to ask myself, whether by not say, putting the ~~Rex Hunt~~ Governor back, just not putting the Governor back, and letting a United Nations Administrator in instead, whether just by that, in the interim period only, we could stop more fighting and more loss of life and if by just doing that we could stop all the fighting and all the dangers, not only for our people but for the [\[end p11\]](#) Argentinians, that would be worth doing and that is the question I had to address to myself in going through these negotiations and I will try to answer it in the House tomorrow.

JY

Now, during last Thursday's debate somebody pointed out that we ought to perhaps offer the Junta a face-saving concession. I mean, an example was President Kennedy at the time of the Cuban missile crisis. He offered Khrushchev a way out and Khrushchev took it and away it went. Is there anything which you could see that you could offer them which would make this go away peacefully?

PM

To involve the United Nations in the interim period would be a face-saving concession.

JY

But do you think they are likely to accept it?

PM

I have always had grave doubts about whether a dictatorship, particularly that kind of Junta, could ever withdraw without demanding as the price of withdrawal the fruits which the invasion sought to gain. In other words like the burglar, they will say, "All right, we will withdraw, but please let us keep all the goods we stole." I've always had doubts about that, and this, I think, is what comes up in every single set of proposals we go through; but I don't know their answer on these final set of proposals and we were quite determined not to go on just talking in an oral way, but to get down our views, our British views, on the things that we would absolutely have to insist upon, because there are fundamental beliefs, to get them down on paper. And that is what we have done, and they have seen those.

JY

A Pentagon official said yesterday that in the situation of the invasion of the Falklands, that you would definitely need air superiority, and in order to gain that superiority you will probably have to bomb airfields on the Argentine mainland. Would you seriously have to consider that? [\[end p12\]](#)

PM

Please do not go any further. I never never say anything about any military options at all. I neither confirm nor deny them. I live every minute of every hour of every day with the feeling that I must do everything to protect the lives of those who are in that Task Force. After all they are there because we ordered the Task Force to go; there to fight for everything that we believe in and their safety, to the greatest extent possible, is my first and primary concern. So I never say anything about any military possibility

or comment in any way. And Jimmy, I sometimes wonder if we could ever have won the Battle of Alamein if every blessed shot had been pronounced upon by the commentators, every blessed option on the morrow had been discussed in the media.

JY

Can I ask you a non-military question?

PM

...I trust that won't be construed as criticism. It is something which worries me.

JY

Something which landed on my desk literally about ten minutes before you came in was a story which said there was talk of giving the Falkland Islands Governor, Rex Hunt, some new role, perhaps as a rallying point for the Islanders themselves. Is that something under consideration?

PM

You've had that ten minutes, I've had it about ten seconds. Thank you for the idea.

JY

But could you let me know whether it is under consideration?

PM

I think you have just put an idea in my mind. I am very grateful. Have you any more?

JY

I think that's about it Prime Minister.

PM

No, we are seriously considering the reply that we expect to get in detail. We had a preliminary reply and as you heard from what the *Perez de Cuellar* Secretary General was saying this morning, at least I heard it on radio, the gap looks big, but we must in fact look at it first. But we in Britain stand for certain things. Our people there are now being denied [end p13] the freedoms that are their heritage and we also stand for international law and those things we must uphold. We will try to uphold it, still by peaceful settlement. We cannot do that unless the Argentines are prepared to agree and if they are not then responsibility for anything else will be theirs.

JY

Prime Minister, thank you for talking to me on the programme.

PM

Thank you very much. Good-bye.