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The Falklands War, 1982 Transcript

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The Falkland Islands are said to be British, but the British are somewhat insouciant about overseas territories. In 1950, there was a survey, "Can you name a single British colony?" 50% could not, though one person replied "Lincolnshire". I imagine that the majority of the audience here tonight are British, and I wonder how many would be able to tell me, without looking at the map, where the Falkland Islands actually are. I will not do a survey, but imagine more could answer that question than before the war in 1982. Here, we can see the Falklands. There are in fact two main islands, West Falkland and East Falkland, and around them, though we cannot see them on the map, there are around 780 smaller uninhabited islands.

The population of the Falklands in 1982 was around 1,800, and they were mostly the descendants of nineteenth century British settlers, and they were mainly engaged in pastoral activities – sheep-farming and the like. Although there were only 1,800 inhabitants, there were around half a million sheep. Now, at around the time of the war, the population was declining by about 30 per year, and it was thought that when it fell below 1,500, it would be unviable.

The Falklands are 300 miles from Argentina, and 8,000 miles from Britain. The Argentines supplied food to the island and medical services, and indeed the islanders relied for almost all their communications and supplies on the Argentinians, who could at any time cut off the air service and cut off supplies. If you go to the south-east, 800 miles away, you can find an island called South Georgia, which plays an important part in the story, and 1,300 miles away to the south-east, you have got a series of islands called the South Sandwich Islands, which also play an important part in the story. Now, these islands are virtually uninhabitable, and indeed there are no native inhabitants on them, but at the time of the war, they represented the headquarters of the British Antarctic Survey and they were staffed with British Government officers there, working there temporarily.

To whom do these islands really belong? The British say they belong to Britain. The Argentineans, who call the Islands the Malvinas, say they belong to the Argentine. Now, British settlers occupied the Falklands in 1833, and the British claim rests on long occupation and the principle of self-determination. To this, the Argentine reply is that the British forcibly colonised the Islands, evicting the Argentinians, and the fact that the Falkland Islands are so close to the Argentine means that they belong to the Argentine and that the settlers there, the British people living there, are illegal, and the Argentineans say the Falkland Islands are a relic of colonialism which should be liquidated, being so close to the Argentine. But you could say, on the argument about territorial closeness or contiguity, the Channel Islands should be French, but no one's suggested that. But I suppose the nearest analogy that someone from the Argentine might use to Britain would be: "How would you feel if, in 1833, we, the Argentineans, had colonised the Shetlands and peopled them with Argentinean settlers?"

The British claim is obviously very powerful in terms of the principle of self-determination, but it is not clear that it is watertight legally in international law and it's never been tested in an international court.

In 1946, a Foreign Office memorandum declared that the occupation in 1833 could be interpreted as unjustified aggression, and in 1966, the then British Government considered asking the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion but decided not to in case Britain did not win the case. But the Argentineans were also not interested in pursuing that course so it was never tested.

Two years after the war, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons said it was unable to reach a categorical conclusion on the legal validity of the claims, so it is a bit uncertain in terms of international law.

But what is certain is that the islanders wanted to remain British and almost unanimously had no wish to be part of the Argentine. Now, some might say, well, can such a small population as 1,800 really have this right of self-determination? So there is an argument on both sides.

In the case of the other islands I have spoken about, that is South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, the British claim appears to be stronger, and Britain approached the International Court of Justice in 1947 and in 1955 for a ruling on who they belonged to, but the Argentineans refused to argue the case, and it seems the British case there is stronger.

In 1964, the Argentineans placed the Falklands dispute with the United Nations, and the United Nations' General Assembly had little sympathy with Britain, and in 1965 said that the Falklands were a relic of colonialism, and one of the fundamental aims of the United Nations has always been decolonisation. The United Nations asked both sides if they would negotiate a solution to this dispute, but of course a negotiated solution would not be easy to achieve because you had two absolutes, two opposing claims to sovereignty, and the desire of the islanders to remain British.

The British representative at the United Nations at the time of the war, Sir Anthony Parsons, said, "Having dealt with the Arab-Israeli problem over the best part of 35 years, I have become doubtful about the proposition that

there necessarily are tidy solutions to all problems”, which I think is a fair comment on the dispute.

If Britain was to maintain the Falklands in the face of the Argentine claim, the question arises of how the Islands were to be protected, and to that question, there were, and still are, two answers: the first is that the Islands should be protected by so strong a deterrent force that Argentine would not dare to invade; the second answer is that some kind of compromise agreement could be reached between the British Government, the islanders, and the Argentine, which might reconcile the conflicting claims.

British Governments, both Labour and Conservative, pursued both aims inconsistently and half-heartedly, and when neither seemed feasible, adopted a policy of playing for time, stringing the Argentineans along in the hope that they would forget about the issue or perhaps that there would be a change of heart among the islanders, and I fear the story is one of muddle, confusion and indecision on the part of both Labour and Conservative Governments.

The Argentineans said in negotiations that if the Falklands were returned to them, the interests of the islanders would be taken into account, and some people in the Foreign Office said that the interests of the islanders were best secured by making some sort of agreement with the Argentine. The official British position was that the Islands were sovereign and that there could be no negotiations on sovereignty and that the wishes of the islanders are, and I quote, “paramount”, but in practice, the British had negotiated about sovereignty from the mid-1960s, and the British had a rather patronising attitude towards the islanders, tended to think of them as a nuisance, hindering good relations with Latin America and in particular with the Argentine. A Labour MP in 1975, not perhaps wholly representative, said that the islanders lived on “an unending diet of mutton, beer and rum, with entertainment largely restricted to drunkenness and adultery, spiced with occasional incest”.

From the late-1960s, British Governments were seeking a way out with the Argentine, which in practice would mean a compromise on the issue of sovereignty. In 1975, the Labour Government sent out to the Islands Lord Shackleton, the son of the famous explorer who was in fact buried on South Georgia, which, as I said, is a dependency of the Falkland Islands, and they asked Lord Shackleton to report on conditions there. They hoped that Shackleton would say the Islands were not viable and they should make what arrangements they could with the Argentineans, but Shackleton did not say that. He said the Islands were viable, or rather they could be made more viable with more investment, and in particular an expansion of the airport at Port Stanley, the major town on the Islands. He said that £12 million should be spent to renovate the Islands and there should be a much more substantial commitment from British military forces to the defence of the Falklands. Now, the trouble was that more investment would annoy the Argentineans and, for whatever reason, there was no such extra investment nor extra troops. The Shackleton Report was ignored.

We now come to the South Sandwich Islands and they are about 1,300 miles south-east of the Falklands. The three southernmost islands in this group of islands are called South Thule. They are completely uninhabited, but were annexed by Britain in 1908. Now, the Argentineans laid claim to South Thule in 1948, and they occupied it in December 1976. The British protested in private but made no public fuss and the occupation continued until 1982, until the war.

The Falkland Islands were protected by one ice patrol ship called HMS Endurance, but after the occupation of South Thule, the Labour Government was worried lest that proved a prelude to an invasion of the Falklands, so in 1977, the Prime Minister, James Callaghan, and the Foreign Secretary, David Owen, reinforced the Endurance with a nuclear-powered submarine and frigates, which they sent to the South Atlantic.

After the invasion of the Falklands in 1982, Callaghan, seeking to embarrass Margaret Thatcher, who was then the Prime Minister, told the Commons that this had been a deterrent and that Margaret Thatcher should have done the same. Callaghan insisted that the Argentineans had been told of this reinforcement, but there is no evidence that they were in fact aware of it and no evidence either that they were, at that time, intended to invade, so the precautionary measures were neither known nor needed and there is no evidence that they deterred.

At this point, officials in the Foreign Office were beginning to work out a possible solution to the problem: a lease-back of the Islands to the Argentine, by which the Argentineans would be given sovereignty but would lease them back to the islanders for a period of years, and that Britain would then administer the Islands for the duration of the lease. That was the status, for example, of the new territories of Hong Kong, which had been leased from China in 1898 for 99 years. Now, the difficulty with the solution was that it required an Act of Parliament to transfer sovereignty to the Argentine, and this transfer would be, at the time, not to a democratic regime but to a very unsavoury military dictatorship. Now, that would be feasible only if the islanders accepted it or at least did not kick up too much of a fuss about it, otherwise you could easily imagine the protests in the House of Commons that people of British origin were being sold out to a dictatorship. The Foreign Office seemed to believe, or perhaps hoped, that acceptance by the islanders would be possible if the issue was raised gently and there was a long educative process. The British were prepared for a long process because obviously the Falklands was a long way down the list of priorities of the British Government, so time was not a problem for the British, but for the Argentine, it was at the very top of their priorities and she would be unlikely to agree to a long-term timescale.

In 1980, Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative Government put forward a lease-back arrangement, according to

which the Islands were to be leased back to Britain for 200 years, to be reviewed every five or ten years in case the islanders had changed their minds and were prepared for rule by the Argentine. After discussions with the Argentine, the period was reduced to 99 years.

Policy of the Falklands was in the hands of a junior minister at the Foreign Office, Nicholas Ridley. Nicholas Ridley was a right-wing Conservative who was very close to Margaret Thatcher, but unlike Margaret Thatcher, he had a very strong sense of humour and he was in the habit of blurting out inconvenient truths, which Margaret Thatcher was not. He had the unfortunate habit for a politician of saying what he thought.

In August 1980, he had talks with the Argentinean Foreign Minister in New York and he said to him, "We have given up a third of the world's surface and found it, on the whole, beneficial to do so." The only claim Britain had which he felt strongly about was our longstanding claim to Bordeaux, his motive being wine. He found it hard to see the motive towards the Islands, where there was no wine, and this understandably led the Argentineans to think Britain was not serious about the Islands.

Ridley visited the Islands in November 1980, hoping to get a compromise, but he got nowhere. The islanders said they wanted not closer ties with Argentine but fewer and that Britain should reinforce its defence and economic commitment to the Islands. Ridley was a very clever man, and like many clever people, he did not suffer fools gladly, and he thought the islanders were being foolish in not recognising the situation, and when he thought that, he was not prepared to be tactful about it, so he told the islanders, if that was their attitude, "You take the consequences," and I am quoting, "You take the consequences, not me!" He said: "If you can't get the medical services and the educational services, if you can't get the oil, then it's you who suffer, not us." The reply first from an islander was: "We know that, we realise that, we're not nits!" Then a second islander asked a question, to which the Government really had no answer: if the Argentineans invaded, what is Britain going to do? The answer from the hall was "Kick them out!" Ridley replied, not perhaps totally unreasonably: "That's not the problem. The problem is: do you want the Argentineans invading you and us kicking them out in a state of perpetual war? That is what you have got to think about it. I mean, it is very well sitting here saying someone else must come and kick the Argentineans out. Of course we will! But is that good for sheep-farming, for fishing, for looking for oil, for all of your futures, for your children and your grandchildren and your great-grandchildren? Is this the way you want to live? That's what you've got to think about!"

Ridley's position became even more difficult through the consequences of legislation, which, by pure chance, was then going through the British Parliament, the British Nationality Bill, and this sought to limit immigration into Britain - plus ça change - and it made a distinction between British citizens and citizens of British dependent territories, and these latter citizens had no guarantee of being able to immigrate into Britain. An exception was made for Gibraltar, whose citizens became British citizens because of their links with the European Communities, and indeed citizens of Gibraltar will have a vote in the forthcoming referendum on whether we should stay in the EU. But no exception was made for the Falkland islanders. The Governor of the Islands said it would be easier to sell lease-back if the islanders were given British citizenship, an assurance that if things went wrong with Argentina, they could come to Britain - they needed an absolute guarantee of entry. But all that the Government could say was they would be given favourable consideration. Now, it seemed the Government, although it so often said the islanders were British, did not regard them as being as British as, say, people from Gibraltar - in other words, they were not given British citizenship.

In December 1980, Nicholas Ridley presented the Government proposals for lease-back to the House of Commons, and it was unfortunate at the time that the Foreign Secretary, Lord Carrington, was not a member of the House of Commons. He was much more senior to Ridley, more respected in the Party and had greater weight and authority. He might just have been able to persuade MPs the virtues of lease-back, might just have been able to, but Ridley was unable to do so. The question as to whether the wishes of the islanders should be made paramount, he avoided saying they were. He said, "I confirm our longstanding commitment to their security and economic wellbeing and I said that in the islands." He accepted the proposals needed to be endorsed by the islanders but not that their wishes should be paramount. There was a storm of criticism on poor Ridley, from both political parties.

The Labour Party was particularly hostile because they said it meant handing over people of British origin to a non-democratic military junta. There was just one MP who supported Ridley, a backbench Labour MP, who said: "The interests of 1,800 Falkland islanders cannot take precedence over the interests of 55 million people in the United Kingdom." Ridley was savaged in the House of Commons and the proposals for lease-back were withdrawn.

It seems to me that the MPs were being irresponsible because lease-back would have given both sides what they wanted: Argentinean ownership, but a guarantee of British rule in the Falklands for a long period to come. I think that, by ensuring the rejection of lease-back, MPs were exposing the islanders to great dangers.

What was the alternative policy? In July 1981, the Joint Intelligence Committee said if Argentina concluded that lease-back involving the peaceful transfer of sovereignty was no longer possible, the use of force could not be ruled out. It also said, and I quote, that the "re-taking of the Islands after an Argentinean invasion is barely militarily viable and would present formidable problems". So the logical corollary of the rejection of lease-back was to reinforce the defence of the Islands. But was it possible or even sensible to maintain indefinitely a large force in the South Atlantic against an indefinite possibility of invasion?

If you were going to do that, that would involve an increase in public spending, but Margaret Thatcher's Government was determined to cut public spending and that meant cutting defence spending. Where were you going to cut defence spending? NATO commitments meant you could not cut defence spending in Europe, so why not make an obvious economy and withdraw HMS Endurance from the Falkland Islands?

Under the Labour Government in 1977, the Defence Secretary had tried to do this but was stopped by the Foreign Secretary, David Owen, who said this would be, and I quote, "...a clear admission of weakness on our part and a lack of determination to defend our interests. Such an announcement would also have a serious effect on the morale of islanders themselves." Owen insisted the ship should be kept in the South Atlantic until the disputes with the Argentine were resolved.

In 1981, under the Conservatives, the argument re-surfaced and, again, the Foreign Office argued against removing Endurance, but this time, the Defence Department won, perhaps because the Defence Secretary, John Nott, was very close to the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, while the Foreign Secretary, Lord Carrington, was not. In June 1981, the White Paper on defence announced that HMS Endurance would be withdrawn from the Falklands in 1982, and that was bound to be taken as a signal by the Argentine that Britain was not really serious about defending the Islands and might turn a blind eye to invasion. It was surely contradictory to say that the wishes of the islanders were paramount when it came to sovereignty, but their wishes could be ignored when it came to investing in the Islands or protecting them from invasion.

During the Falklands crisis, Labour critics of the Government were to say, with some justice, that cuts in defence spending, which Labour on the whole had welcomed, meant that commitments should also be cut, and the Conservatives could not cut defence spending, if that is what they wanted to do, without also cutting commitments.

So, the policy was neither lease-back nor protecting the Islands. It was one of stringing the Argentineans along and playing for time. It seems to me a highly irresponsible policy and islanders were being exposed to great danger, as Ridley had insisted, but without sufficient protection from the British. The Argentineans said the islanders depended on them for essential services which they were supplying, but they were being given nothing in return. So the options before the British Government, one cannot deny, they were all unpalatable, but after all, what are Governments for if not to make unpalatable decisions in difficult situations? If all Government decisions were easy, we could all be Government Ministers, no doubt.

The situation might have been contained had there not been a military coup in the Argentine in December 1981, replacing one military dictatorship with another. The new Argentine leader was General Galtieri, and when the Foreign Office suggested that Margaret Thatcher send the customary message congratulating him on achieving power, she replied, not unreasonably, "I do not send messages on the occasion of military takeovers." The new regime faced an appalling economic situation: 100% inflation and rising unemployment. Now, with the 150th anniversary of British occupation, as they saw it, due in March 1983, it might not be surprising if they attempted a glamorous military exploit to distract attention from the domestic situation, and the Government was aware of this possibility but had no policy to forestall it.

It seems that the Argentineans were preparing for an invasion in late-1982, following a debate on the Falklands scheduled for the UN General Assembly. By that time, Endurance would have gone and the chance of success would have been greater than at the time of the actual invasion. At the time of the invasion, on 2nd April 1982, Endurance had not yet been withdrawn, but the invasion was brought forward following an unplanned incident which has some of the ingredients of comic opera - I mean if the consequences were not so tragic.

On 19th March 1982, there was an unauthorised landing on the island of South Georgia, which is about 800 miles south-east of the Falklands. As I said, that was inhabited only by British officers working on the Atlantic Survey and that also had been cut back in spending cuts, so by the time of the landing, there was no permanent British presence on the island. The landing was made by an Argentinean scrap-merchant called Davidoff, who had a contract to buy the unused equipment on the island for himself and he had the agreement of the British Embassy in Buenos Aires to land and obtain the equipment, but he refused to comply on South Georgia with the necessary formalities, saying that this meant recognising British sovereignty. He set up the Argentinean flag on the island.

In retaliation, in the Falklands itself, the islanders broke into the Argentinean Air Force offices and they replaced the Argentine flag with a British flag, and marked on a desk, with toothpaste, "Tit for tat, you buggers!" The force of their protest was weakened since the Argentineans did not understand what it meant and needed a dictionary to translate it.

Davidoff's activities in South Georgia had probably not been authorised by the Argentinean Government - it is not clear, but probably not - but the Government certainly took advantage of them. The Argentinean junta sent an ice-patrol to South Georgia to reinforce Davidoff. To give you an idea of the nature of the junta, the commander of the ice-patrol was a Lieutenant Astiz, who was wanted by Sweden and France for the murder of a girl and three nuns. Britain reacted by sending two submarines to the South Atlantic. The Government did not want to announce this publicly, so as not to provoke Argentine or cause loss of faith, but unfortunately, the plans became known to the maverick right-wing MP and famous diarist Alan Clark, who made them public. But

there were also, as well as the submarines, there were contradictory signals because a junior defence minister told the Commons that the operation in South Georgia had occurred outside the NATO area. The Government hoped the problem could be solved by diplomacy. Margaret Thatcher said that Britain should go to the International Court of Justice. The Foreign Secretary, Lord Carrington, said, I think wrongly actually, but he said "We might get the wrong answer", though I think Britain had a strong legal case. But Margaret Thatcher then said, "There's no earthly point in sweating blood over it if it's not ours." It was not clear.

The presence of the scrap-merchant and his assistants on this virtually uninhabited island was to lead to war because the junta had come to the view that the British would not fight if the Falklands were invaded, and they had a number of reasons to believe that: the first was the failure to act on the Shackleton Report; the second was the unopposed occupation of South Thule in the late-1970s; the third was the lease-back proposals and the long discussions about sovereignty; the fourth was the withdrawal of Endurance; the fifth was the British Nationality Act; and the sixth was the muted response to the unauthorised landing on South Georgia.

On 26th March, the junta ordered an invasion for 2nd April and that would force a discussion, so they believed, on the transfer of sovereignty so that Argentina would be strung along no longer, and a small force on the Falklands was obviously rapidly overwhelmed and Argentina declared the incorporation of the Malvinas, as they called it, into the Argentine.

As you can imagine, there was a political outcry in Britain as a result. British territory had been seized without warning and British subjects were now under occupation, in effect under the rule of a foreign dictator. The Government was blamed. In an opinion poll carried out shortly afterwards, only 12% said that no blame was attached to the Government, 58% of them said a lot, 22% said a little, 36% said the Prime Minister was to blame, and 34% said she should resign. But at the same time, the British attitudes were more muted than they are often thought to be and a little while later, on 2nd May, before the fighting had really begun, 60% of those questioned said they were unwilling to see the lives of servicemen lost in the Falklands, and 66% said they were unwilling to see civilian lives lost in the Falklands. Just 24% said that policy should be decided by the wishes of the islanders; 72% said they should be decided in the interests of Britain as a whole.

The Government was exposed, as I said, to tremendous criticism, and I think a good bit of it was unfair. Since the junta did not decide on the invasion until a week before, spurred on by events in South Georgia and a fear that Britain might reinforce the Falklands, if they did not decide until a week before, how was the British Government to be aware that this invasion was to take place? As late as 19th March, the Ambassador in Buenos Aires wrote to the Foreign Office "We know the current team to be much too intelligent to do anything so silly." By the time the Foreign Office received the message, someone wrote on the letter "Overtaken by events".

The Government, understandably, assumed that invasion would be preceded by diplomatic activity at the United Nations and by a process of economic pressure on the Falklands. A year after the invasion, there was an inquiry into the war, led by Lord Franks, a former civil servant, and he concluded the Government could not have predicted the invasion, and I think that is correct - it could not. But I think, in another sense, the Conservative Government was as culpable as the previous Labour Government had been in having no coherent policy on the Falklands, neither negotiate nor strengthen - simply string Argentina along, a policy likely to fail. I remind you, the Joint Intelligence Committee had said in July 1981: "If no peaceful transfer of sovereignty, a full-scale invasion cannot be discounted." The real criticism of British Governments, both Conservative and Labour, is they did not recognise that threat and did not take sufficient measures to deter it. Michael Foot, the Leader of the Opposition, said that the Conservative Government had betrayed the Falklands. In my view, all the parties had betrayed them.

When the Defence Secretary, John Nott, brought Margaret Thatcher the news of the invasion, she said "It was the worst moment of my life", and the Government was clearly in danger, could not survive without a response. The Government decided to send a task-force to the South Atlantic. Some were sceptical about it, and Geoffrey Howe, the Chancellor, said that sending a task-force would "...give the impression we are in a position to reverse or re-conquer. We ought to convey the opposite impression." But I think the Government had no alternative. I think Nigel Lawson, who was then the Energy Secretary, probably summed up opinion better when he said "Public opinion won't regard this as a faraway island."

When Margaret Thatcher asked the First Sea Lord how long the task-force would take to get to the South Atlantic, 8,000 miles, he said three weeks, and Margaret Thatcher said "You mean three days?" He said, "No, no, I mean three weeks."

Sending the task-force did not necessarily mean a war. Indeed, the Government hoped it would not. The purpose of sending the task-force was to increase British diplomatic leverage to get the Argentine off the islands, and Margaret Thatcher shared the hope of the Government that war could be avoided. At a later stage in the negotiations, she personally telephoned the United Nations Secretary-General, and I quote from his memoirs: "She appealed to me to keep her boys from being killed. I sensed this was the woman and the mother who was speaking to me, a very different picture from the firm, seemingly belligerent leader of the British Government. From this call, I was certain that Margaret Thatcher was not, as so much of the press was reporting, hell-bent on war."

Parliament met on the day after the invasion. It was a Saturday, the first time Parliament had met on a Saturday since Suez. Now, recently, as you know, it's met on a Saturday to consider David Cameron's negotiations with the European Union. The Opposition Leader Michael Foot was as angry as Margaret Thatcher and the Conservatives. He said there was no question in the Falkland Islands of any colonial dependence or anything of that sort. "It is a question of people who wish to be associated with this country and who have built their whole lives on the basis of association with this country. They have been betrayed. The responsibility for that betrayal rests with the Government. The Government must now prove by deeds - they will never be able to do it by words - that they are not responsible for the betrayal and cannot be faced with that charge." The only party which voted against the task-force was Plaid Cymru, the Welsh nationalist party.

But the position of near unanimity was misleading because, as the task-force came nearer to the South Atlantic and it became clear there might be fighting, some in the Labour Party were to urge further negotiations. On an adjournment debate on 20th May, before serious fighting had begun, 33 backbenchers, led by Tony Benn and Tam Dalyell, voted against the Government, and there was certainly a view amongst many MPs that the task-force would fail and the Islands could not be re-captured.

But the main dissent came, curiously enough, at the beginning at least, from Conservative MPs, though it was expressed in private, and the Conservatives were certainly not as united as they appeared. Part of the reason for that was that Margaret Thatcher had many opponents, enemies almost, in the Conservative Party, the so-called wets who were opposed to her economic policy in particular, and her Parliamentary Private Secretary reported to Margaret Thatcher on a party meeting that Ian Gilmour, who'd been sacked from the Government the year before, said "We are making a big mistake - it will make Suez look like common-sense." Stephen Dorrell, the future Health Secretary, was apparently very wobbly: "We'll only support the fleet as a negotiating ploy. If they will not negotiate, we should withdraw." Kenneth Baker's Diaries show that Norman Lamont, who was a junior minister at the Department of Energy at the time, said "We have gone out of our collective mind", and Nicholas Ridley said "She is mad and will have to go."

In his Diaries, Alan Clark comments the following: "It is only on occasions such as this that the implacable hatred in which certain established figures hold the Prime Minister can be detected. They oppose Government policy whatever it is. They would oppose free Campari sodas for the middle classes if they thought the lady was in favour. They are within an ace, they think, of bringing her Government down. If by some miracle the expedition succeeds, they know and dread that she will be established forever as a national hero," which is roughly what happened. "So, regardless of the country's interests, they are determined the expedition will not succeed. The greater the humiliation of its failure, the more certain will be the downfall of the lady's Government.

Margaret Thatcher, significantly, said about the aim of the Government, "It is the Government's objective to see that the Islands are freed from occupation and are returned to British administration at the earliest possible moment." She did not use the word "sovereignty". She was already beginning to make concessions.

On the Monday after the House of Commons debate, Lord Carrington and the other Foreign Office Minister resigned from the Government, the other Foreign Office Minister involved with Latin American affairs. The Defence Secretary, John Nott, also offered his resignation. In some ways, he was more culpable. That was refused because that would implicate Margaret Thatcher, who had pressed for the removal of Endurance, against the wishes of the Foreign Office.

The new Foreign Secretary was Francis Pym. He had won a military cross in the War and, perhaps for that very reason, was very disinclined to go to war - he knew what war was like. He was a former Chief Whip and therefore it was thought he would understand the House of Commons, but he was a wet in economic terms, opposed to Margaret Thatcher's economic policy, and the chemistry between him and Margaret Thatcher was poor. He had been removed from the Department of Defence in January 1981 and replaced with John Nott, precisely because he'd resisted the cuts in defence spending which Margaret Thatcher was determined to make, and his task was to utilise the forces of diplomacy to try and prevent war. At first, diplomacy seemed to promise success. The United Nations condemned Argentina. A Security Council Resolution condemned the resort to force and required Argentina immediately to withdraw her troops and negotiate a settlement, but it did not require a return to the status quo ante - there was no chance of getting UN support for that because the UN regarded the Falklands as an element of colonialism. Still, this was a start.

The Americans were cross-pressured. Most South American countries supported Argentina, precisely because they saw the Falklands as an example of colonialism, and America did not want to lose the friendship of the South American countries in their battle against the Soviet Union and Communism. But after a short period of hesitation, America backed Britain, and the American Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, said "We will never do another Suez on you". Indeed, the record shows the Americans had told the Argentine Foreign Minister that they would back Britain if the Argentine invaded, but the Foreign Minister had told the Argentine dictator that the Americans would remain neutral. Whether he had not heard, had misinterpreted, has misunderstood or deceived is not clear. But the Americans said, if they were to support Britain, in order to convince Congress and public opinion, they must use diplomatic channels before resorting to force, and there were a number of compromise solutions proposed. The first was that the Organization of American States would get the Argentine out of the Falklands and there would then be an interim mixed administration on the Islands while a settlement was negotiated. Margaret Thatcher was hostile to that, but Francis Pym appeared sympathetic, and Margaret

Thatcher asked her to listen to what Alexander Haig was saying, and Margaret Thatcher said "The good Lord did not put me on this planet so that I could allow British citizens to be placed under the heel of Argentine dictators." Haig noted to a colleague, "Poor old Pym, he's not long for this world," and indeed Pym was to be sacked immediately after the General Election of 1983.

But all this is I think misleading. Margaret Thatcher was far more flexible and cautious than she appeared. She appreciated that to win over the Americans she had to appear flexible. She was prepared to make substantial concessions. She prepared a statement for the Americans, saying "There can be no negotiation about the future status of the Falkland Islands until the Argentine Forces are withdrawn and British administration has been restored", but after reflection, she crossed out the words "and British administration has been restored".

Haig, the American Secretary of State, said the Argentine wanted the British task-force to turn back immediately an agreement was signed. Margaret Thatcher said that was not possible until the Argentine withdrawal was completed, but she said the task-force can move more slowly, and she told the Americans it might be worth making big concessions if Argentine withdrawal could be guaranteed. She was very lucky that the Argentine throughout were thoroughly inflexible and said there must be recognition of Argentinean sovereignty before withdrawal, and they told the Americans they should press for the decolonisation of the Islands on the grounds of the United Nations Declaration.

Margaret Thatcher, nevertheless, continued to negotiate and, contrary to myth, I do not think there was as great a difference between her and her Foreign Secretary as seemed the case. She was not as rigid as painted. The Argentines could have had a settlement favourable to them, which I think would in practice have rewarded them for using force.

At one point, Francis Pym brought proposals from the Americans which the American Secretary of State later admitted involved a camouflaged transfer of sovereignty. Pym recommended acceptance and Pym said, if you want to avoid a war, that is the price you would have to pay. Margaret Thatcher said this was conditional surrender. Dennis Thatcher put it more demotically. He said "Let them off the hook and it's going to happen again!" Margaret Thatcher said she would resign if the War Cabinet agreed. The problem was resolved by saying the proposal should be put to the Argentine, which predictably rejected them.

On 25th April, South Georgia was recaptured. This was announced by the Defence Secretary, John Nott, and Margaret Thatcher made her famous remarks, which are often misquoted, as "Rejoice! Rejoice!"

MT: "The Secretary of State for Defence has just come over to give me some very good news and I think you'd like to have it at once."

"The message we've got is that British troops landed on South Georgia this afternoon, shortly after 4pm London time. They have now successfully taken control of Grytviken. At about 6pm London time, the white flag was hoisted in Grytviken, aside the Argentine flag, and shortly afterwards, the Argentine Forces there surrendered to British Forces. The Argentine Forces offered only limited resistance to the British troops. Our Forces were landed by helicopter and were supported by a number of warships, together with a Royal Fleet Auxiliary. During the first phase of this operation, our own helicopters engaged the Argentine submarine Santa Fe off South Georgia. This submarine was detected at first light and was engaged because it posed a threat to our men and to the British warships launching the landing. So far, no British casualties have been reported. At present, we have no information on the Argentine casualty position. The commander of the operation has sent the following message: "Be pleased to inform Her Majesty that the White Ensign flies alongside the Union Jack in South Georgia - God save the Queen". Thank you very much."

MT: "Just rejoice at that news and congratulate our Forces and the Marines. Goodnight, gentlemen."

Reporter: "Are we going to declare war on Argentina, Mrs Thatcher?"

MT: "Rejoice."

Margaret Thatcher said "Just rejoice at the news and congratulate our Forces and the Marines" and later she said "Rejoice". She was quoted as saying "Rejoice! Rejoice!" in a triumphalist manner and, in the 1983 Election, Denis Healey accused her, on the basis of those comments, of "glorying in slaughter". In fact, South George was recaptured without any loss of life on either side, and that, Margaret Thatcher believed, was worth rejoicing about.

At that point, she said that if the Argentines agreed to cease hostilities and withdraw the troops, negotiations could take place, but again, the Argentines rejected that. Had they accepted, I think the Government would have split because the proposals were unacceptable to some in the Government. But there was now no alternative, so it seemed, to force, and the US was coming more and more on the British side.

On 2nd May, the British commander noticed an Argentine cruiser, the *Belgrano*, which was accompanied by destroyers carrying Exocet missiles. It was outside the exclusion zone which Britain had laid down and was cruising away from it. Nevertheless, the commander on the spot thought it was a threat to British aircraft carriers and, under Article 51 of the UN Charter, which gave a country the right to self-defence, it would be legal to attack it, and when he told the Chiefs of Staff in London, they agreed to that, and the War Cabinet agreed. The *Belgrano* was torpedoed and sank and it was assumed the destroyers accompanying the cruiser would pick up the survivors, but the destroyers fled from the scene and left the sailors to drown, and 300 were drowned. The commander on the spot also wanted to attack the destroyers accompanying the *Belgrano* because they had missiles, but the Government was told this would not be legal under Article 51 and therefore the War Cabinet said that those destroyers could not be attacked. The commander of the task-force was very annoyed at that. He said that it put British troops in danger. But nevertheless, the British Government accepted that legal advice.

Militarily, the *Belgrano* was a success. Its effect was to force the Argentine Navy back into port for fear of further attack. Diplomatically, it was not a success. There was a hugely unfavourable international reaction, and people demanded that negotiations be resumed. Domestic critics of the Government said the *Belgrano* had been sunk deliberately to scupper a new peace proposal which had come from the Peruvian Government. The trouble is, the War Cabinet were not aware of this proposal when the decision to sink the *Belgrano* was made, so I think that is implausible. In any case, the effect of the *Belgrano* in Britain was not to scupper peace plans but to push the Government into further concessions to meet a hostile international opinion. Francis Pym told the Commons that, "In the end, there must be a negotiated settlement. The sooner it comes, the better it will be."

The next day, the Cabinet discussed the peace plan from Peru. That involved an immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of forces, with an interim administration to be involved in the administration of the Islands. That would include Britain but also a representative from the Argentine, it would supervise Argentine withdrawal and negotiate a definitive agreement on the status of the Islands, taking into account the wishes of the islanders, but there was no mention of paramountcy, and Francis Pym said that the British had an open mind on the question of sovereignty. The Government, and this included Margaret Thatcher, accepted the Peruvian peace plan involved compromising principles, but she was prepared to accept it. She said, "I fear we can't get the wishes of people and self-determination but still worth it." So she was willing to accept it, and she said it was wrong to say the Cabinet was divided, and therefore, I think, far from being the Iron Lady of legend, she was prepared to make very significant compromises.

She was saved again by the Argentinean rejection, and Alexander Haig, the American Secretary of State, said in despair that they were "a gang of bandits down there" - they were rejecting what seemed to him very reasonable proposals. The Argentines used the sinking of the *Belgrano* as the reason for the rejection, and the junta issued a statement saying: "The Argentine Government will not, in the face of this military pressure, accept any negotiations relating to peace in the South Atlantic in these circumstances. We would rather die on our feet than live on our knees." So, you may argue that Britain sinking the *Belgrano* was not intended to scupper the Peruvian peace plan, but it had that effect by persuading the Argentines to reject them. We will never know whether that was the reason or the excuse. My view is that it was the excuse because the Argentines had been so inflexible before - it was unlikely they would suddenly become flexible, but it may be that they would have done. But what they decided to do was to take their case to the United Nations, where they thought they had stronger support on the grounds of colonialism.

On 16th May, Britain made her final offer to the United Nations on a "take it or leave it" basis, which the Argentines saw as an ultimatum, but this final offer involved great concessions: ceasefire, an interim administration in the Falklands to supervise mutual withdrawal, and the UN to govern the Islands, with the representatives of the islanders, while talks took place. There was no reference to self-determination of the islanders, and future talks on sovereignty were to occur without pre-conditions, and these negotiations to be conducted by the United Nations. Now, before she agreed to this, the British Ambassador to the United Nations, Sir Anthony Parsons, said to her, "Do you realise what the whole thing amounts to in terms of concessions, which take us a long way from our original negotiating position? You are content with what I'm taking back?" She said, "Yes, I am content - I understand the full implications of it. You go ahead and do your stuff." I think, if the Argentine had accepted it, it would have been very difficult to defend it in the House of Commons because it would have taken away, in effect, the right of the islanders to self-determination and they would have been ruled for some of the time at least by someone other than the Governor appointed by Britain. The substance of sovereignty, that is the right to have troops on one's territory and control its administration, was being abandoned by the Government, and a UN administrator was to be sent instead. Now, the UN authority in the Falklands offered Argentina a good chance of gaining sovereignty, and certainly there was the reality of a non-British administration on the Islands for a foreseeable period. Had these proposals been available to Argentina before the invasion, it almost certainly would not have taken place.

So, a critic would say, and this is what Tony Benn did say, you were now fighting a war for islands which Britain had neglected and at times had sought to abandon, and was now in effect prepared to abandon, and Benn said

Britain should hand over the Falklands to the United Nations and then step up sanctions on Argentina so as to bring the dictatorship down. But, again, Britain was saved by the Argentine, which rejected the UN proposals as well. This was the seventh set of peace proposals. The Argentine had rejected them all. From this point on, Margaret Thatcher was indeed intransigent, not prepared to make any further compromises. Troops were now landing in the Falklands. Interim administration or mutual withdrawal were no longer realistic, and Britain, understandably, wanted a military victory, the achievement of the task-force, a great logical achievement so far away from Britain, and on June 15th, the Argentine surrendered. Margaret Thatcher celebrated. Her deputy, William Whitelaw, said, "I don't think anyone else but you could have done it," and Dennis Thatcher said, more prosaically, "Well done, have a drink!"

The junta in the Argentine fell shortly afterwards and was replaced by a democratic government. But did the war really resolve the problem in the Falklands? Indeed, from one point of view, it made it rather more difficult to resolve. When Jeremy Corbyn recently became Leader of the Labour Party, the Argentine Ambassador to Britain told her Government that he was, and I quote, "one of ours", and Jeremy Corbyn called for reasonable accommodation with Argentina. He said, "It seems to me ridiculous that in the 21st Century we would be getting into some enormous conflict with Argentina about some islands just off it."

Now, what might have been realistic before the invasion was clearly not realistic after it. Whereas, before the invasion, Britain had been prepared in practice to discuss sovereignty, it couldn't do so anymore. You couldn't now negotiate with Argentine on lease-back or any other arrangement, and the islanders were strengthened in their determination not to surrender sovereignty. A referendum was held in 2013 on a 92% turnout - 99.8% decided the Falklands should remain a British overseas territory; just three islanders were in favour of joining Argentina. After the war, the airfield was extended at a cost of £319 million, and a small naval and military garrison was sent there. Roughly, between £20,000 and £30,000 a year is spent on every islander by Britain every year.

During the conflict, one economist close to Margaret Thatcher, Alan Walters, who we'll hear a lot of in the next lecture about the exchange rate mechanism, where Margaret Thatcher agreed with him - on this, she didn't agree with him, because he said "You should offer the islanders £50,000 a head to return or go away and nothing for continued British rule." Margaret Thatcher said that was the rat's way out, she wasn't having that. The population has now increased to over 3,000, perhaps partly as a result of the war, but the irony is, if Argentina had not invaded, the population might have fallen below the 1,500 which would have made it unviable, and the Governor had predicted in 1976 that there would then have been "euthanasia through generous compensation".

Argentina still maintains her claim, and it's strengthened because it's now believed there may be oil around the Islands. In 2012, the then President of the Argentine, Cristina Kirchner, persuaded her neighbours in Latin America to ban shipping bearing the Falklands flag from entering the ports. She also threatened to ban aircraft bound for the Falklands from entering Argentinean national airspace. It is not clear to me that the British military presence is strong enough to deter a future invasion nor that we could be fortunate enough to recover the Islands if there were to be a future invasion.

If one looks at the domestic political consequences, in a sense, the war was irrelevant to Britain's domestic problems, particularly economic problems, and also the main elements of her foreign policy, particularly in relation with Europe, but from another point of view, it seemed to show that strong leadership could reverse what had seemed since Suez an irreversible path of decline. Indeed, it was the first major foreign policy success since Suez, and perhaps the Falklands' spirit could be used to transform the economy as well, at least that's what Margaret Thatcher thought. In the House of Commons, in the middle of the war, she told Parliament, quoting from Shakespeare's King John, "Nought shall make us rue if England to herself do rest but true". A Scottish Nationalist MP objected to the reference to England. Margaret Thatcher replied, rather tartly, "I am sorry if by quoting Shakespeare I have caused offence."

At a Conservative Party rally on 3rd July after the victory, she attacked what she called "the faint-hearts" and she linked the Falklands with economic troubles at home. She said, "We have ceased to be a nation in retreat. We have instead a newfound confidence, born in the economic battles at home and tested and found true 8,000 miles away. The lesson of the Falklands is that Britain has not changed and that this nation still has those sterling qualities which shine throughout our history." By chance, shortly afterwards, a rail strike was called off in London and one observer said "It was an astonishing thing to witness - the fortunes of the whole country transformed in the space of a few days by a single decisive intervention," which does over-simplify it.

Clearly, the fate of the country was not at stake in the Falklands, but the fate of the Government and the Conservative Party was, and there's an argument about whether it helped Margaret Thatcher win the 1983 General Election. The Conservatives were already beginning to improve in the polls before the Falkland War began because inflation was falling, and on 2nd April, the very day of the invasion, the Conservatives took the lead in the polls for the first time in a year. Their economic policy was popular, despite the rise in unemployment, because the unemployed tended not to vote and tended to live in safe Labour constituencies so they weren't electorally significant. The fall in inflation was more important electorally and the right-to-buy policy was also popular and the fall in income tax and the weakening in the power of the trade unions. It seems to me that something fundamental had happened in British politics, and this was best summed up by a guru of the left, the

Marxist Eric Hobsbawm, who said this: "The war had mobilised a public sentiment which could actually be felt, and anyone of the left who was not aware of this grassroots feeling ought seriously to reconsider his or her capacity to assess politics."

I end with the two paradoxes: the first the one with which I began the lecture, that a serious diplomatic failure and a national humiliation led to a great political and military success; and my final paradox is a sad one, that the success did little to resolve the basic problem of the Falklands. Indeed, it may have made it more difficult to resolve. Shortly after the invasion, the Foreign Office produced a memorandum in which it said that "Our objective is to ensure that not only the immediate problem is resolved but that the position of the Falkland Islands is not left in a manner which requires either a costly and permanent defence commitment and which does not leave the Falklands as a source of future instability and crisis." Now, I think it can't be said this aim has been achieved, and you may argue that we are now the prisoners of our victory in the Falklands, and perhaps, looking at the dispute in the Falklands, if you forget for a moment about the oil, some of you might be tempted to agree with the great Argentinean novelist, Jorge Luis Borges, who said the dispute was "like one between two bald men fighting over a comb".

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