

Live

cc Mr Coles
Sir Anthony Parsons

PRIME MINISTER

I attach a first shot at a skeleton for your speech on the opening of the Debate on the Franks Report, as a basis for our discussion this afternoon.

E. E. R. BUTLER

19 January 1983

PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH IN DEBATE ON
FRANKS REPORT : FRAMEWORK

I beg to move that the House takes Note of the Report.

Remind House of the origins of the Committee:-

First promised on 8 April 1982

Consultations with Leader of Opposition
and Privy Counsellors in Opposition parties

Terms of reference and Membership agreed

Establishment of Committee announced on 6 July

Procedure of the Committee

Access to all papers of the British Government, more than anyone else has seen because no Member of present Administration has seen earlier papers.

42 meetings, including 40 whole day meetings.

Invited submissions from anyone with evidence to provide - also invited any member of the press with specific information to come forward with it.

Oral evidence not only from Ministers and officials of the present Administration but former Prime Ministers; people with special knowledge and interest; broadcasting media; and journalists.

Content of the Report

- i) First chapter - development of dispute under previous Governments. Won't take the House through this in detail but worth quoting the three significant themes of the period mentioned in paragraph 70.

Do not think that the Leader of the Opposition would deny that it was position of both parties

that solution had to be acceptable to the islanders and that the heart of the difficulty was that Argentina principally interested in sovereignty and islanders not prepared to accept transfer of sovereignty.

ii) Period of administration of present Government - FCO very properly put options to Government. Collective consideration. Policy set. Meetings of OD on 29 January 1980, July 1980 and in December 1980 and in January 1981 which set subsequent policy. Thereafter no changes in policy. But Lord Carrington reported at frequent intervals.

iii) Deal with three specific matters which have been subject of comment in Franks Report and since.

i) Decision on HMS Endurance

Successive Governments had recognised that it was not significant to defence of islands. Decision to withdraw was collective Cabinet decision as part of defence review. It has been argued that decision to withdraw was signal to Argentine Government. If so, it was a signal which had been given before and had not proved decisive. And previous Governments had given more decisive signals.

ii) Intelligence machinery

Not true that intelligence machinery ignored Argentine press reports. Essential point is that no one has identified what hard intelligence was available to pick up. Neither Americans nor anyone else had it.

But Government has considered the observations of Lord Franks on intelligence machine - announce decisions.

iii) Should some deterrent force have been sent down on 5 March ?

The Franks Committee considered Lord Carrington's decision not to send a submarine not unreasonable and I am certain that that view is right.

Three points to make:-

first, in considering all such action, it was debatable whether it would deter an attack or provoke;

second, it would not have deterred an airborne attack which would easily have taken the island;

third, as the rest of the Franks Report indicates, there was every reason to believe that military action by Argentina, if it happened at all, would happen later in the year.

Conclusion

Right to remind the House that the Franks Committee considered all these matters and other assertions made by those who commented.

Its unanimous conclusion that it would not be justified in attaching any criticism or blame to the present Government for the Argentine Junta's decision was taken in the light of its consideration of all these matters and all the evidence it had taken.

On that basis the Government justified in asking for the support of the House.