



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
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MO 5/21/5

26th January 1983

Dear Tim,

FRANKS DEBATE

You asked this morning for a critique of the defence points made by Dr Owen in his speech yesterday. This is attached, in the form of speaking notes. I also enclose, as you requested, a chronology of decisions on HMS ENDURANCE and of the subsequent exchanges between the Defence and Foreign Secretaries. You may also like to see a note which the DGI has produced on the capability of Argentine forces in April 1982. This is also attached.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Richard Hatfield in the Cabinet Office.

Yours ever

Mich Evans

(N H R EVANS)
APS/S of S

T Flesher Esq

Owen - Subs 3 mins

In his speech the Right Hon Member for Plymouth Devonport made extensive comparison of the events of 1977 with those leading up to the Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands. As the House will know the convention in these matters is that I do not have access to the papers of past administrations. I am not, therefore in a position to comment in detail on what happened in 1977.

But I would like to make some general comments on what he said. First he implied that if we had deployed a nuclear powered submarine to the South Atlantic at the beginning of March 1982 it might have deterred the Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands. He has stated that the submarine deployed in 1977 was given rules of engagement which provided that if Argentine ships came within 50 miles of the Falkland Islands and were believed to have displayed hostile intent, the submarine was to open fire." If that was the case, I must say that I am amazed that the previous Government were prepared to allow one of our submarines to open fire on the high seas on the ships of a country with which we were not at war. (It seems to me that action such as this, far from deterring an Argentine invasion, might have triggered it off.) And in a climate of extremely unfavourable world opinion arising from our action.)

As I said in the House yesterday, the sinking of an Argentine ship before an attack on the Islands had taken place would have condemned us in the eyes of the world. We know from our experience last year the importance of the support of our Allies and of the international community in an operation such as this.

5 mins
Wider
3 mins
X 4 mins
Robert 51

Mr Speaker, as I understand it the other component of the 1977 Force was 2 frigates. But the Argentines had an overwhelming capability to attack two frigates. They had sufficient maritime air reconnaissance aircraft to find them and 116 tactical jet fighter bombers all capable of sinking them.

Or they could have used surface ships. They had one carrier, one cruiser, 8 destroyers and 3 frigates. This force would have overwhelmed two frigates.

Finally they could have attacked with their submarines.

AR Bombs
But in any event the option of an airborne landing would have remained open to them. Argentina has one Parachute Brigade of 3,000 men - an elite force better trained than the average army unit. A total of some 700 troops could have been dropped in a single wave.

We are left with the reality that a limited display of force risks triggering a confrontation with which you are not equipped to deal. It is easy to gloss over those realities with the benefit of hindsight. The judgement on this incident of the Franks Committee - who had access to all the papers - is quite clear.

~~The Right Hon Gentleman also stated that "I believed in 1977, and I believe now, that withdrawal of HMS ENDURANCE would be substantially misread by the Argentines".~~

Red came forward
Evidence - Truth needed
in view of risk to defend allies
from such conditions in Argentina.
President Reagan

Mr Speaker, I am fully aware of the arguments on Endurance but they have to be stretched a long way to say that the announcement had a decisive influence on the junta. There were signs the other way. The Royal Marine garrison was to remain and we made this entirely clear. Paragraph 146 of the Report quotes the unequivocal statement of my honourable Friend the Member for Shoreham, in this House on 3rd March: "We have no doubts about our duties to the Islands." And as for our capability for operations outside the NATO area and our will to exercise that capability if necessary I would remind the House of the announcement on 8th March that INTREPID and FEARLESS would after all remain in service. We all recognise that the junta was capable of irrational and emotional decisions but it is just not credible that the announcement of ENDURANCE's withdrawal from service determined their actions.

returned to letter phone call for. Several
hours

Finally - President Reagan

- We would reply and it
is a casus belli

- Seriously about US - / British
relations

Via President Bush to Just

Callen - talked ^{50h} only in terms of withdrawal
Over 200000 10 weeks - we delivered our reply

HMS ENDURANCE: CHRONOLOGY

1981

- June 3 Secretary of State for Defence's OD paper on the Defence Programme Review. Among the measures recommended is the phasing out of ENDURANCE in 1982.
- June 5 Lord Carrington minutes Defence Secretary prior to OD meeting. He points to the importance of ENDURANCE in both political and defence terms. "Unless and until the dispute is settled it will be important to maintain our normal presence in the area at the current level. Any reduction will be interpreted by both the Islanders and the Argentines as a reduction in our commitment to the Islands".
- June 8 OD meeting discusses Mr Nott's minute. The proposals are generally agreed but, in the Prime Minister's summary, she states that "particular problems for other ministers which arose from these proposals should be pursued with the Secretary of State for Defence bilaterally".
- June 10 Meeting between officials following which Foreign Office officials judge there is no prospect of decision being reversed and report accordingly to Mr Ridley.
- June 30 Decision to withdraw ENDURANCE is confirmed in Parliament by Lord Trefgarne, as follows: "I can confirm that HMS ENDURANCE will be paid off in 1982 on her return to the United Kingdom, following her deployment in the South Atlantic and the Antarctic region later this year. There are no plans to replace her. However, the Royal Marines garrison in the Falkland Islands will be maintained at its present strength, and from time to time Her Majesty's Ship will be deployed in the region". Strong public reaction followed. The Governor reported the strong reaction of the Islanders but expressed his personal and private view that it would be unrealistic to expect ENDURANCE to be treated as a special case.

*Passage deleted and retained under Section 3(x).
AWayland, 15 January 2013*

- December 15 Mr Nott sees Lord Buxton and confirms that he does not intend to run the ship on.

1982

- January 22 Foreign Secretary minutes Defence Secretary. Emphasises the political problems which the decision to withdraw ENDURANCE is causing. "The issue is having a disproportionate effect on the credibility of our policy in the area". Asks whether Mr Nott would be prepared to reinstat her.
- February 3 Mr Nott replies. He is considering her future following her paying off. The options are to sell her, place her in reserve or scrap her. Sale to the only country expressing interest - Brazil - is not acceptable. Keeping her in reserve might keep the controversy alive although "it might allow the controversy to cool down with time". In

the circumstances he cannot agree to run on ENDURANCE at the expense of other commitments. As FCO cannot fund the ship he sees little alternative to sticking to the decision unless Lord Carrington sees scope for an approach to OD for new money.

February 17 Lord Carrington replies. He does not rule out an approach to OD for new money but wishes to wait until after the next round of Anglo/Argentine talks at the end of February "when we shall have a clearer picture of Argentine intentions and of the defence implications". He will consult Mr Nott again in due course.

March 24 Lord Carrington writes to Mr Nott urging that, in view of the South Georgia incident ENDURANCE should "remain on station in the area of the Islands after the rotation of the Marine Garrison is completed at the end of the month".


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ARGENTINE CAPABILITIES APRIL 1982

1. You asked for a note on Argentine air and naval capabilities, particularly against two frigates and also para-dropping troops, in April 1982. And also whether the Argentines had access to satellite intelligence.

The Frigates

2. The Argentines had an overwhelming capability to take out two frigates. They had three principal methods. In probable order of priority these were:

a. Air Attack. The Argentines had about 116 tactical jet fighter bombers all capable of sinking a frigate. They had sufficient maritime air reconnaissance aircraft to find the frigates. However, the Super Etendard fitted with Exocet was probably not available until late April 1982. But it could have used bombs. Argentine air power of course demonstrated its effectiveness against the co-ordinated air defence capability of the Task Force. Two frigates would have been exceedingly vulnerable.

b. Surface Attack. The Argentines had a surface fleet of one carrier, one cruiser, 8 destroyers and 3 frigates. The carrier could have deployed 8 Skyhawk attack aircraft. The frigates would also have been very vulnerable to the long range guns on the cruiser. And 8 of the surface combatants were also fitted with Exocet (MM 38). This force would have overwhelmed two frigates.

c. Submarine Attack. The two Argentine S209 submarines fitted with wire guided torpedoes would have posed a considerable threat. They are quiet and difficult to detect. But in the event we knew later they had problems with their fire control systems.

Para-drop Capability

3. The Argentine have one Parachute Brigade of 3,000 men. They are an elite force better trained than the average army unit. A total of some 700 troops could have been dropped in a single wave.

Satellite Intelligence

4. As far as we are aware the Argentines had no access to satellite intelligence. But they would have had access to the Landsat data available to all nations. It has little if any military significance.

26th January 1983


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28

