

THATCHER'S TORPEDO

THE SINKING OF THE 'BELGRANO'

Tam Dalyell MP

author of 'One Man's Falklands'

In this scorching polemic Tam Dalyell challenges Mrs Thatcher head-on: 'the specific charge is that the Prime Minister . . . coldly and deliberately gave the order to sink the Argentine cruiser, *General Belgrano*, in the knowledge that an honourable peace was on offer and in the expectation that HMS *Conqueror's* torpedoes would scupper the Peruvian peace plan then under way'.

Delving, by means of more than three hundred parliamentary questions, and undeterred by the Government's evasions, misinformation and ridicule, Mr Dalyell has established that the *Belgrano* was on course for its home port when sunk, *not* approaching the task force; that it was *not* equipped with Exocets and was therefore *not* a potential major threat as the Government claimed; that it was *not* heading for the shallow waters of the Burdwood Bank, where it was claimed it might have been lost by the *Conqueror*; that it was *not* part of a three-pronged attack on the task force. 'Small inaccuracies are often part of larger ones,' the author reminds us, 'and seemingly small lies are part of larger lies.' Step by step Tam Dalyell unfolds his discoveries, supporting each point with substantial evidence. 'Even last week when I was interviewed on Independent Radio News I was

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By the same author

ONE MAN'S FALKLANDS

THATCHER'S TORPEDO

Tam Dalyell

Introduction by Paul Rogers

'I do not think that anything like
this episode has happened during
the parliamentary lifetime of any
of us.'

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Introduction

Within twenty-four hours of the Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands on 2 April 1982, the major political parties in Britain had united in support of the government's decision to send a task force. At the time, few people in the country in general or parliament in particular believed that the crisis would end in military conflict.

A minority of MPs opposed the sending of the task force, seeing it as a gross over-reaction, the response of a post-colonial power determined not to lose face. Some MPs persisted in their opposition to the government's action and three of them who were also Labour Party spokesmen in the Commons were sacked from their posts by Michael Foot.

One of these MPs, Tam Dalyell, became particularly concerned with two aspects of the war. One was the sinking of the Argentine cruiser, the *General Belgrano*, which, with other British attacks on 1-2 May, formed the start of the 'killing war'. The other was the possibility that the invasion by Argentina had not come 'out of the blue' the previous month, but had been foreseen and even welcomed as a political diversion from the considerable domestic difficulties which the government then faced.

Over the past year, Tam Dalyell has become well known for his continuing opposition to the war and has used the methods of investigation open to a backbench MP to throw light on many aspects of the war. In doing so he has incurred the displeasure of the government and even some of his colleagues, but his complex and persistent parliamentary questioning has brought to the surface many examples of misinformation which accompanied the war.

More particularly, as his reputation as a critic of the government's Falklands policy has grown, so too has his postbag. From Britain and many parts of the world, letters and other messages have come in which are

slowly filling in the missing pieces of a remarkable jig-saw, one which shows a radically different picture of the Falklands War from that of conventional wisdom. They concern preparations for the task force which appear to have started several weeks before the Argentine invasion of the islands. They concern the remarkably close military links between Britain and Chile both during and after the war. They throw further light on the deployment of nuclear weapons on the task force. Most of all, they add to the already disturbing picture of the events of 1-2 May.

A government has many means of maintaining the secrecy of its actions and policies, but an operation such as the Falklands War, involving so many tens of thousands of people, is bound to become a trifle leaky. This is not surprising as it has now become evident that the government did not enjoy quite the level of support which seemed apparent at the time.

This question of public support is of particular interest. For with the acquiescence of the major political parties and the strong approval of nine-tenths of the press, it is clear that a substantial body of public opinion was effectively disenfranchised. How large this was—and is—is difficult to say, for the opinion polls at the time rarely asked the relevant questions. But a curious feature of the war was that opinion indicators such as radio phone-in programmes consistently showed a much greater level of concern over government action than the polls suggested. This critical undercurrent persists, and if there is one subject which attracts immediate and consistent interest, even a year after the event, it is the sinking of the *Belgrano*.

On 30 April last year, after a period of frenetic shuttle diplomacy, the mediation mission of the US Secretary of State Alexander Haig was brought to an end and the United States declared itself in support of the British position. Haig's mantle was taken up by the Peruvian government and by the UN Secretariat and a further bout of peace-making followed, beginning on 1 May.

By 30 April, therefore, Britain had the support of

the whole of the EEC group of nations together with Japan and the United States. It was in a position to organise the harshest campaign of economic sanctions on Argentina. Indeed the classic conditions for the use of economic instruments in the pursuance of foreign policy were available. It would therefore have been appropriate to follow such a policy, using it to aid Peruvian and UN efforts to achieve an Argentine military withdrawal. Negotiations over a permanent settlement would have followed, leading in all probability to a lease-back arrangement providing an environment for the economic development of the Falkland Islands and the surrounding marine resources.

What is quite extraordinary is that the British government took the opposite decision and embarked on the killing war within 36 hours of the declaration of US political and economic support. In the first two days of that war, British actions resulted in over 400 Argentine dead. The first British deaths from Argentine action followed two days later.

Both before and after these events, the government persisted in its claim that Britain's military policy was one of minimum force, under strict political control, to achieve a diplomatic settlement, but it is now clear that this was very far from the truth.

In the early hours of 1 May, a Vulcan bomber, operating out of Ascension Island, made an attack on the Stanley runway, aimed at putting it out of action and thereby further enforcing the blockade of the islands. Attacks by Sea Harriers and a naval bombardment later in the day were said to be following a similar purpose.

Technical sources, however, later indicated that both the Vulcan and Sea Harrier raids involved the use not just of conventional bombs but of cluster bombs, weapons totally unsuited to destroying a runway. The BL755 cluster bomb has 147 bomblets, each producing up to 2,000 fragments dispersing over an area of 1½ acres and having a devastating effect on people. It is a far more sophisticated anti-personnel weapon than napalm. During the early afternoon of 2 May, two

frigates and a destroyer closed to within gunnery range of the Stanley military base and began an intensive barrage using their radar-controlled 4.5 inch guns with a collective firing rate of over one shell a second. These shells were fused for air-bursts, not the ground bursts which might further have damaged the runway, and no doubt had a devastating effect on Argentine personnel.

The Argentine forces *admitted* to 56 casualties in these raids, but their propensity to minimise casualties indicates that they may have been far higher. The manner of these attacks made nonsense of any claim to be using minimum force and provided a context for the attack on the *Belgrano* the next day.

The *Belgrano* was sunk at approximately 8 pm, London time, on Sunday, 2 May, with the loss of 368 lives. An immediate result was that the Peruvian peace initiatives foundered. The attack lost Britain considerable international support, did much to prevent any kind of negotiated settlement and also helped to ensure that the crisis would be resolved solely by military means. Among the consequences of this conflict were the loss of some 1,200 British and Argentine lives, an expenditure of several thousands of millions of pounds, the eventual development of Fortress Falklands and the re-armament of Argentina. The stage has thereby been set for further Falklands Wars rather than any fundamental resolution of the political differences between the two countries. The contradictions concerning the sinking of the *Belgrano* are remarkable. Government sources have claimed that the cruiser was sunk almost immediately it was detected, that it was heading towards the Total Exclusion Zone, was closing on elements of the task force and was a formidable fighting ship armed with Exocet missiles. It has since been established, primarily by careful parliamentary questioning by Tam Dalyell, *that all of these assertions are false*.

The *Belgrano* was detected over 30 hours before it was attacked, and was shadowed by the submarine *Conqueror* throughout that time. It was not armed with Exocet and when it was sunk it was sailing away from the Total Exclusion Zone, away from the task force and

towards its home port. The *Belgrano* was armed with 6-inch guns which had a maximum range some seven miles less than the Exocet missiles which equipped fifteen ships of the task force. Far from threatening the task force, the uncomfortable truth is that the *Belgrano* was an aged ship, a survivor of Pearl Harbor, due to be taken out of service (as its sister ship had been in 1979) and turned into a floating museum.

The one piece of equipment of significance which the *Belgrano* did carry was a long-range surveillance radar, the Dutch-built LWO8 system, and this explains why it was at sea south-west of the Falklands. It was there, on a regular patrol, and with no orders to enter the exclusion zone, so as to act as a sea-borne early warning system, particularly important in view of Argentine expectations of a British action against the Rio Grande and Ushuaia bases on Tierra del Fuego, and fears of a possible Chilean involvement in the crisis.

Much of the international press saw the attack on the *Belgrano* as the pivotal event of the war, giving an indication of Britain's determination to avoid a political settlement, whatever the cost. That interpretation is now coming to be widely accepted in Britain.

The speeches in the House of Commons by Tam Dalyell on which this book is based give the background to the assertion that the Falklands War was fought for domestic political purposes. They are inevitably controversial, but the controversy surrounding the events they describe seems certain to grow, not to diminish.

Perhaps central to all our concerns is the manner in which the government's record of events has been subject to such frequent change, and the fact that this has been made clear solely through the persistence of one back-bench member of parliament. A succession of reasons has been given for the decision to sink the *Belgrano* and as each has been disproved, so a new one has been erected.

As the *New Statesman* put it recently, 'the official story has been constantly changing, which is usually a sign that an account of events is being manufactured

after the event in order to meet political requirements'. If Tam Dalyell's analysis of the nature of those political requirements is correct, and there is now an uncomfortably large body of evidence to support him, then the implications are quite fundamental for the government of this country.

Paul Rogers

1. Delving for the Truth

When I appeared before the Franks Commission on Friday, 22 October [1982] to give oral evidence at its request, Lord Franks made it clear that the very few references that I had made in my original written evidence to the Commission to events after 2 April, were outwith the terms of reference of that Falkland Islands inquiry.

Therefore, I shall devote my time this evening to the events of 1 and 2 May—a period emphatically not covered by Franks—and to the circumstances surrounding the decision to sink the *General Belgrano*. I do so in the hope that Parliament and hon. Members on both sides of the House will—as it is far from being a straight-forward yah-boo party issue—come to judge that there are sufficient disturbing facts to justify an inquiry along the lines of that asked for in question No. 15 for 20 January 1983:

To ask the Prime Minister, if she will establish an Inquiry under the Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) Act 1921 into the circumstances surrounding the sinking of the *General Belgrano* and into related events from 30 April to 4 May—

the procedure of the Lynskey tribunal. The nub of the argument is that, whatever the reasons for ordering Commander Christopher Wreford-Brown, DSO, captain of HM submarine *Conqueror* to fire lethal mark 8 torpedoes—or were they really Tigerfish?—at the *General Belgrano*, they had little or nothing to do with the immediate military needs of protecting the task force, or ships of the task force at or around 8 pm London time, which is 1457 hours South Atlantic time on Sunday, 2 May.

By parliamentary question it has been established that the range of the surface-to-surface Exocet carried by her escorts—the *Piedra Buena* and the *Hipolito*

Bouchard—was at the most 42 km. I understand that the maximum range of the guns of the *General Belgrano* was 13 miles. By parliamentary question it has been established that when the *General Belgrano* was torpedoed, her position was 55 degrees 27 minutes south, 61 degrees 25 minutes west. By parliamentary question it has been established that she was on a course of 280 degrees—that is, on course for the Straits of Magellan and her home port of Uschaia in the southern Argentine.

By parliamentary question it has been established that there were no units of the task force west of the *General Belgrano*. Indeed, in answer to question No. 102 on 16 December, the Prime Minister said:

the vessels of the task force were, broadly speaking, to the north-east.—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1982; Vol. 34, c. 201.]

How are we to explain the following statement from the Secretary of State for Defence:

This heavily armed surface attack group was close to the total exclusion zone and was closing on elements of our task force which was only hours away—
[*Official Report*, 4 May 1982; Vol. 23, c. 29-30] ?

No less misleading was the statement made in response to a written question on 29 November. It said:

Concerned that HMS *Conqueror* might lose the *General Belgrano* as she ran over the shallow water of the Burdwood Bank, the task force commander sought and obtained a change in the rules of engagement to allow an attack outside the 200-mile exclusion zone.—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1982; Vol. 33, c. 104.]

Careful checking of the charts reveals that when the *General Belgrano* was struck, it was far to the south-west of the Burdwood Bank, and was steaming in a

west-north-west direction. Moreover, *Jane's Fighting Ships* reveals that the draught of HMS *Conqueror* is 27 ft and possibly 55 ft when submerged. The Valiant class of submarine, of which HMS *Conqueror* is one, have sonar that allows them to operate in the shallow waters of the Baltic.

The oceanographers tell us that the Burdwood Bank—incidentally, well surveyed—is in 25 fathoms, or over 150 ft of water at its shallowest. For the most part it is in 90 fathoms or more, or in 540 to 600 ft of water. Therefore, we may be forgiven for concluding that references to the Burdwood Bank were excuses rather than reasons for torpedoing the *General Belgrano* at 8 pm on Sunday, 2 May, whatever the situation may have been earlier.

Questions No. 113 and 114 ask:

why, in view of the position and the course of the *General Belgrano*, orders were given to torpedo her on a 280 degree course at a position well outside the Burdwood Bank; what positive evidence was available at the time she was torpedoed that the *General Belgrano* would change her course and made for the Burdwood Bank?

The reply was:

It would not be in the public interest to go into details.—[*Official Report*, 14 December 1982; Vol. 34, c. 59.]

For that sentence one might substitute, '*It is becoming far too embarrassing for Ministers of Defence and the Prime Minister to answer these detailed, precise parliamentary questions, albeit they refer to movements of Argentine ships six months or more ago, because if answers were given, the cock and bull nature of some of the previous answers might be exposed.*'

In her letter of 20 December—which I have requested to be printed in *Hansard*, the Prime Minister told me:

I can only repeat that the facts underlying the attack of the *General Belgrano* are as given to you both in the House and at the presentation by the Task Force Commanders that you attended in the Ministry of Defence on 23 November.

The trouble is that those facts do not tally with the position of the *General Belgrano* that was given in parliamentary answer at the time that she was torpedoed. It is within my clear recollection—as I was listening intently—that Sir Sandy Woodward told the few Members of Parliament there that he was concerned that HMS *Conqueror* might lose the *General Belgrano* going over the Burdwood Bank.

Indeed, my recollection was confirmed by a parliamentary answer on 29 November at c. 104 which said:

Concerned that HMS *Conqueror* might lose the *General Belgrano* as she ran over the shallow water of the Burdwood Bank, the task force commander sought and obtained a change in the rules of engagement to allow an attack outside the 200-mile exclusion zone.—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1982; Vol. 33, c. 104.]

But it transpires that the *General Belgrano* was torpedoed at 55 degrees 20 minutes south and 61 degrees 25 minutes west—at least 45 miles to the south-west of the edge of the Burdwood Bank and heading west-north-west. That information comes from the *Official Report* for 15 December, c. 171.

One thing that 20 years in the House of Commons develops in a man is the instinct to sense when one is being told something that is not quite right. Normally I would have accepted a senior officer's word unquestioningly, but then we live, do we not, in an age of misinformation? I scurried back to the House of Commons to start checking the co-ordinates and to make inquiries about the Burdwood Bank.

Delving by means of parliamentary questions reveals the indisputable fact that for some reason or another,

Admiral Sir Sandy Woodward misled those who came to the presentation, which I had hitherto treated as unattributable, but which the Prime Minister used against me in her letter of 20 December. Apparently, there is one set of rules for Downing Street on unattributable presentations and another set of rules for ordinary Members of Parliament. The important issue here is why on earth Admiral Woodward should feel that he had to mislead on this sensitive issue at the presentation and, I understand, at others.

I cannot believe that Admiral Sir Sandy Woodward is other than an extremely competent navigator, mariner and ex-submariner. I do not believe for a moment that he would make elementary errors in his co-ordinates in ascribing the need to sink the *General Belgrano* to possibilities of what might happen as HMS *Conqueror* and the *General Belgrano* traversed the Burdwood Bank.

The only convincing reason why Admiral Woodward should have felt that he had to mislead Members of Parliament and others is that he was asked to pull someone else's chestnuts out of the fire—by which I mean protect the Prime Minister from people alighting on the real reasons why she ordered the sinking of the *General Belgrano*.

The proven fact is that when the torpedoes were launched at 14.57 hours South Atlantic time on 2 May, any hazard posed by the Burdwood Bank—the alleged reason why it was necessary to fire—was something of the past, at any rate for the time being. How comes it that the *General Belgrano* was such a threat to the task force—or HMS *Conqueror*—when she was making for her home port? As Commander Wreford-Brown referred the issue the moment he first sighted the *General Belgrano* to Sir Sandy Woodward, the task force commander, who in turn referred the question of what action to take to Northwood, which in turn referred it to the War Cabinet, the threat cannot have been that immediate.

Such is the contrast between the early indications of the *General Belgrano* and her escorts 'converging on' the task force and the actual positions extracted by

parliamentary questions, *The Times* of 14 December could carry the headline on page 2: 'Replies put Task Force on dry land'.

We face a web and tissue of contradictions and misinformation.

Even more serious is the fact that the opening 10 words of paragraph 110 of the White Paper encapsulate a highly significant inaccuracy which the drafters of the White Paper must have known to be inaccurate to the point of wilful deceit of the House. It reads:

On 2 May HMS *Conqueror* detected the Argentine cruiser, *General Belgrano*.

That is not so, according to my information. I understand from two members of the crew whom I am not prepared to name that the statement on page 157 of the *Sunday Times* book *The Falklands War* is correct and that HMS *Conqueror* detected the *General Belgrano* and her escorts at least 24 hours before 14.57 hours South Atlantic time, 8 pm London time on 2 May. That would mean that HMS *Conqueror* sighted the *General Belgrano* on 1 May or, more probably, on 30 April.

In my experience, small inaccuracies are often part of larger ones and seemingly small lies are part of larger lies. If Ministers resent that, they should agree to a tribunal and make the undoctored log of HMS *Conqueror* available to it. It should also be allowed to cross-examine Commander Christopher Wreford-Brown, Surgeon Lieutenant-Commander Christopher MacDonald and Petty Officers Billy Guinea and Billie Budding, all of whom are mentioned by name in the *Sunday Times* book and other unnamed members of the crew of HMS *Conqueror*. Why should there be such discrepancies between the facts and what is said in paragraph 110 of the White Paper?

On Monday, 13 December I asked the Secretary of State for Defence:

for how long continuously HMS *Conqueror* had the *General Belgrano* in her sights or in any other form

of contact?

That extracted the following answer:

It would not be in the public interest to disclose the extent of our knowledge of Argentine naval activity.

The same less than helpful answer covered questions No. 104 and 105 about the whereabouts of the *25 de Mayo* on 2 May. Ministerial statements to the effect that she was going to perform a pincer operation on the task force with the *Belgrano* are a lot of flannel. As I say, questions No. 104, 105 and 114 on 13 December all met with the reply:

It would not be in the public interest to disclose the extent of our knowledge of Argentine naval activity.

Also on Monday, 13 December, I asked the Secretary of State

if he will outline the considerations of security which now apply (a) to the identity and (b) to the position of Argentine vessels in company with the aircraft carrier *25 de Mayo* on 2 May;

and

whether the identity of the Argentine vessels accompanying the aircraft carrier *25 de Mayo* on 2 May is known to Her Majesty's Government?

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces replied:

It would not be in the public interest to give details of our knowledge of Argentine dispositions. — [Official Report, 13 December 1982; Vol. 34, c. 62-63.]

It is widely known that the *25 de Mayo* was accompanied by type 42 destroyers *Hercules* and *Santissima Trinidad* and that they were in or very near port. The

Department of Defence seems to think that Members can be fobbed off with any old story about pincer movements unsupported by fact. If there is evidence of a pincer movement, that evidence should be submitted to the tribunal for which I have asked.

I give just one more example of how Ministers are trying to take us for a ride and to fob us off. Let colleagues cast their minds back to 4 or 5 May. Was there not a general impression in Parliament, in the Press and in the country that the *Belgrano* had been sunk under the rules of engagement? The Secretary of State for Defence himself said:

The actual decision to launch a torpedo was clearly one taken by the submarine commander.— [*Official Report*, 5 May 1982; Vol. 23, c. 156.]

Two months later, however, on 5 July, Commander Wreford-Brown returned to the West of Scotland, hoisted the Jolly Roger—tastelessly, in view of the number of lives lost—and imprudently displayed the dagger to show that the submarine had participated in operations in conjunction with special forces. He then let the cat out of the bag by informing the Scottish press corps that, in the words of the *Aberdeen Press and Journal*:

The situation was reported to Fleet HQ at Northwood, Middlesex. The decision to attack was taken by HQ and was confirmed by Commander Wreford-Brown.

Eric Mackenzie of *The Scotsman* corroborated the fact that the Commander of *Conqueror* vouchsafed that his orders to sink *Belgrano* came from Northwood.

David Fairhall, the careful defence correspondent of *The Guardian*, wrote on 5 October:

The decision to let *Conqueror* loose on the *Belgrano* was made by the Prime Minister and members of her inner war cabinet, who were lunching at Chequers on May 2nd.

Reports along such lines have never been denied because they are widely known to be true.

I hasten to excuse the Foreign Secretary, as he was in Washington and New York at the time. I refer here to my question of 24 November:

Arising out of the discussions on nuclear safety, what did the Foreign Secretary say to his Italian colleagues who are interested for ethnic reasons—because of the number of Milanese and Neapolitan families involved in the loss of life—about the sinking by the nuclear submarine *Conqueror* of the *Belgrano*? He could say to them, could he not, that he was in New York when the order was given on Sunday, 2 May, about to dine with Perez de Cuellar, that he has a clean sheet, that he was not present at the war cabinet and that he did not know about the order to sink the ship?—[*Official Report*, 24 November 1982; Vol. 32, c. 859.]

I was then rebuked by Frank Johnson in *The Times* for failing to provide details of what they had for dinner.

It will be within the recollection of the House that, far from leaping to the defence of the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary murmured gratefully that his discussions in Europe were outwith the scope of the question. He was equally cautious on 8 December, as reported at c. 862-3 of the *Official Report*, when I reiterated that he had no part in the decision to sink *Belgrano*. Of course, we understand that the right hon. Gentleman rightly wishes to distance himself from the Prime Minister and the decision to sink *Belgrano*.

Whatever the considerations which prompted the orders from Northwood to launch the *Conqueror's* torpedoes against *Belgrano*, by 8 pm London time on 2 May, they were not those of military necessity. A day or more earlier, they might conceivably have been so, but not by the South Atlantic afternoon of 2 May, when *Belgrano* was going home.

Had a new factor entered into the calculations of the war cabinet, minus the Foreign Secretary, between the evening of 1 May and Sunday, 2 May? There was indeed

a new factor—knowledge of a genuine peace offer. On the evening of Saturday, 1 May the Army Council, some 60 generals of senior rank with more immediate powers over their member of the junta than a constituency Labour Party has over any MP, cajoled or persuaded the dipsomaniac, alcoholic Galtieri to agree to order the Argentine forces back from the Malvinas. It was the army that mattered, but Admiral Anayan, the naval member of the junta, had ordered his fleet back to port. This is now common knowledge in Argentina, as his decision was furiously contested by Naval Aviacon, the equivalent of the Fleet Air Arm.

The House will easily understand that the Argentine military was penetrated by American intelligence to the extent that President Galtieri's every decision was known in Washington within minutes rather than hours. Neither the Army Council decision, nor Admiral Anayan's order could possibly have been kept from Washington.

Americans whom I feel are trustworthy and in a position to know, confirm what I learnt indirectly from General Alberto Menena, a member of the Army Council, that the tidings of Galtieri's decision to withdraw were indeed passed to Washington, and were quickly sent to London and the Prime Minister. Does any hon. Member imagine that a message of import, at that time, from the United States Administration, would not have been passed on to the Prime Minister? It is inconceivable.

Thus, there was pressure from America, from Peru, from the Organisation of American States, from the United Nations and from the Labour Party leadership to accept the first aim of the task force referred to by Sir John Fieldhouse in the *London Gazette*, to bring about the withdrawal of Argentine forces from the Falklands on the basis of resolution 502, on which so many put 'such great store'.

The charge laid at the door of the British Prime Minister could hardly be more grave. It is specifically that, along with her Defence Secretary and the Chairman of the Conservative Party, but in the absence of the Foreign Secretary, she coldly and deliberately gave the orders to sink the *Belgrano*, in the knowledge that

an honourable peace was on offer and in the expectation—all too justified—that the *Conqueror's* torpedoes would torpedo the peace negotiations.

Faced with a compromise, involving the withdrawal of Argentine and British forces, and based on resolution 502 which she correctly sensed world opinion would expect her to accept, the Prime Minister calculatingly and deliberately ordered the torpedoes to be unleashed to create an incident which she understood perfectly well would switch the whole war from second into fifth gear. If there had been no *Belgrano*, there would probably have been no *Sheffield*, no *Atlantic Conveyor*, no *Ardent*, no *Antelope* and no *Coventry*.

Tales of Sir Terence Lewin scurrying off to Chequers to tell the inner Cabinet of the threat posed by *Belgrano* may or may not be true, but certainly Sir Terence's alleged actions are in the category of camouflage—or 'misinformation' to use the current polite term. The brutal truth is that on or near her waking hour that Sunday morning, 2 May, the Prime Minister was confronted by messages of serious peace proposals emanating from the United States and Peru, based on what was happening in Argentina. Over a period of at least five hours she deliberately and knowingly elected to create an incident of predictably dreadful proportions. The Prime Minister's motives will remain a matter of argument among historians. They will have to take into account the extent to which her perception of British public opinion was such that she did not want to be like that Grand Old Duke of York in marching the task force 8,000 miles to the South Atlantic and marching it back again.

The matter is too urgent to be left to historians. We need a tribunal to turn its immediate attention to the extent to which the decision to sink the *Belgrano* was to do with the soubriquet of Iron Lady and allusions by the right hon. Member for Down, South (Mr Powell) about ascertaining the metal of which the Prime Minister was made.

The fusing of personal vanity and political calculation can lead to dreadful results. A tribunal might well take the view that electoral considerations in Britain were

not the paramount reason why the Prime Minister ordered the sinking of the *Belgrano*. It might perceive that it had even more to do with the leadership of the Conservative Party, because who doubts that in the absence of a scrap—I went to see the Prime Minister and I could judge her mood on 21 April, which is more than most Members did—and military victory *per se*, the return of the fleet would have raised all sorts of doubt about the wisdom of despatching the task force in the first place.

The sinking of the *Belgrano*, when the right hon. Lady knew what she did about peace proposals, was an evil decision of an order that it would not have occurred to me to attribute to any other leading politician of any party since I have been in the House—certainly not to Harold Macmillan, my first Prime Minister, Alec Home or the right hon. Member for Sidcup (Mr Heath). To give such an order behind the back of her Foreign Secretary and possibly in the absence of her Home Secretary—men who knew only too well what war was about—without warning the Government of the United States, whose hemispheric relations would be predictably further injured, and at a point when there was no military necessity, was a criminal act by the British Prime Minister. It was an act of calculated wickedness and reckless folly, the like of which has not been witnessed in the political lifetime of most of us in the House.

There is a duty on this country to initiate an inquiry or tribunal forthwith. If we do not, the truth will dribble out. As I put it in my oral evidence to the Franks Commission in relation to earlier events covered by its inquiry, there are ‘talkative, voluble, memoir-writing Americans who will sooner or later reveal the truth’. There are men and women in Washington with much to tell, who will talk at the moment of their choosing.

2. Lured on to the Punch

May I start by identifying what I hope may be the eventual outcome of this debate over the coming weeks: either the setting up of an inquiry into the conduct of the South Atlantic conflict in relation to decision-making in London—taking into account the precedent of the inquiry into the Crimean war—or at least an inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the sinking of the *Belgrano*—taking into account the precedent of the inquiry into the Jameson raid during the Boer war.

There is a distinction to be made between types of inquiry. One might call for an inquiry into the actions of troops or sailors engaged in battle—for example, what happened at Bluff Cove. I would not be at all keen—as I gather one of our Welsh Nationalist colleagues is—on trying to apportion blame to commanders in the heat of battle, if indeed blame there be. I was too often on 7th Armoured Division exercises in the north German plain not to understand perfectly clearly what can happen even in exercises, let alone in battle. That type of inquiry, therefore, has no support from me.

The second type is rather different. This calls for an inquiry into an act that was basically political. I take the view that the sinking of the *Belgrano* was basically a political act.

As was readily accepted by the East of Scotland British Legion central committee, meeting in Bo'ness on Saturday, 5 March 1983—I am one of the vice-presidents of that organisation—my criticism has been reserved for politicians, and at no time has it been extended to soldiers, sailors or airmen in the field.

My general view is that the security and intelligence services, like the Foreign Office and the service defence attachés, performed their task during the months preceding and during the Argentine invasion extremely well. The politicians must bear the responsibility for landing Britain in the mire of the south Atlantic.

I begin with a potentially critical question about MI5

and MI6, and I have no idea of the answer. I have given public and private notice to the Leader of the House of my question. I raised the matter during business questions last Thursday. Is it true that an arms dealer in the south of England, whose name is known to the Government, had telephone numbers for contacting senior levels of the security services, and was given the proverbial brush-off when he told them of the activities of Mr Klein, an arms dealer in New York, and Mr Karl Villavicienza, an arms dealer in Hamburg, in abusing the end-users certificate system by approaching a Sudanese politician to sign for a batch of 30 Exocets destined for Argentina? Will the Minister label that point A when he replies?

Could the security services really have been so casual as *The Observer* investigative journalist, Mr Peter Durisch—who was smuggled into the arms negotiations—suggests in that newspaper? I simply dread to think of properly fused Exocets or Israeli Gabriel missiles in the hands of some maverick Mirage squadron commander in the sticks some 1,500 miles south of Buenos Aires. That may be the immediate danger, rather than a thought-out plan from Buenos Aires.

I refrain from referring to this afternoon's exchanges on the Argentine loan with the Prime Minister, the Leader of the House and the Financial Secretary to the Treasury about the financing of those hideous weapons. However, I am a little curious about the basis on which the security services apparently hand out their phone numbers. On what criteria do people qualify for such special treatment? Let us call that point B.

On Tuesday, 26 October, in answer to a specific question on the Falklands, the Prime Minister confirmed what she had said to George Gale in a major interview in the *Daily Express*—that the Falklands crisis had come out of the blue on Wednesday, 31 March. Note that it was not South Georgia or anything of that kind, but the Falklands crisis. George Gale asked her 'Did the Falklands crisis come at you more or less out of the blue?' 'Out of the blue,' said the Prime Minister.

I turn to the events of this month a year ago, and

look at how the security and intelligence services, together with the Foreign Office, performed. The Franks report, page 44, paragraph 150, shows that on 2 March the British defence attaché in Buenos Aires wrote to the Governor of the Falkland Islands, copying his letter to the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, about the Argentine military threat to the Falklands. Page 45 of Franks, paragraph 152, shows that on 3 March the British ambassador in Buenos Aires reported further comment in the Argentine press on the unilateral communiqué. When the Prime Minister saw the telegram, she wrote on it: 'We must make contingency plans.' That was written in the right hon. Lady's own handwriting.

The Franks report, page 45, paragraph 153, shows that on 8 March, the Prime Minister spoke to the right hon. Member for St Ives (Sir J. Nott), the then Secretary of State for Defence, and asked him how quickly Royal Naval ships could be deployed in the Falkland Islands if required.

In my oral evidence to the Franks committee I told Lord Franks, with respect, that he had a duty to make it clear whether he believed that the Prime Minister—to use the phrase which I told Franks I had borrowed from my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner)—not averse from having a fight should the situation develop, 'lured the Argentines on to the punch'.

I put it to the House that the following references endorse that cold and rather brutal view of the Prime Minister's behaviour; paragraph 157—personal messages from Carrington to Haig; paragraph 155—draft telegram from Carrington to Costa Mendes, 18 March; paragraph 169—Foreign and Defence Ministers agreed on 20 March that *Endurance* should sail for South Georgia; paragraph 187—minute from Carrington to the Prime Minister, 24 March, paragraph 153—

on 8 March the Prime Minister, for whom the crisis was to come out of the blue on 31 March, spoke to Mr Nott and asked him how quickly Royal Naval ships could be deployed to the Falkland Islands if required.

A Prime Minister who supposed that there was not a possibility of an invasion in the near future would not have asked her Defence Secretary that question.

Consider the reply—incidentally, four days later, mid-week:

Passage of time for a frigate deployed to the Falklands, which would require Royal Fleet Auxiliary support, would be of the order of 20 days.

That would have taken to 28 March.

What this adds up to is that, solemnly warned of the need to make contingency plans, which she herself had accepted three days before, the Prime Minister could have had frigates and Royal Fleet Auxiliaries in the Falklands by Sunday, 28 March.

This is all against the background, if we are discussing the security services, of paragraph 95, the final paragraph of the JIC assessment of 9 July 1981, which stated that if Argentina concluded that there was no hope of a peaceful transfer of sovereignty there would be a high risk of its resorting to more forcible measures against British interests and it might act swiftly and without warning. In such circumstances, military action against British interests and it might act swiftly and without warning. In such circumstances, military action against British shipping or—again the JIC report—of a full-scale invasion of the Falkland Islands could not be discounted.

Moreover, the Prime Minister knew from the week that she entered Downing Street in May 1979 that the Falklands presented one of the most potentially dangerous situations that she inherited. The Cabinet Secretary of the day briefs every incoming Prime Minister on the really thorny issues and alerts Prime Ministers to Foreign Office and intelligence identification of thorny problems.

Against such a background, why did the Prime Minister not put the Falklands, in early March 1982, on the agenda of the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee of the Cabinet? Was it simply that the Cabinet seemed to be ignored? It is an astonishing fact that from earlyish April the war seems to have been conducted by the

Prime Minister, Admiral Lewin, Admiral Fieldhouse and the right hon. Member for Hertfordshire, South (Mr Parkinson). They, basically, were the troika who seem to have made the decisions in support of the Prime Minister.

Or is there a more sinister explanation—that, knowing what she did—clearly, from the meat for all to read in the Franks report—she was not averse to allowing the situation to run so that she could be able to present Britain as the injured party and have a little war that would rally the nation behind her?

If this is a dreadful allegation and imputation to make against the British Prime Minister, why is it that, knowing what she did, she never at any time, either directly or through the Foreign Office or the intelligence service, as far as any of us know, let Buenos Aires know what would be the consequence, in the form of the task force, of an invasion of the Falklands.

With respect, the Franks committee has not refuted that which I told it in oral evidence it would be expected to refute—that the British Prime Minister lured the Argentines on to the punch. It is, of course, a possible explanation that she had sensibly reconciled herself to the long-held Foreign Office view that if Argentina were to attack we would have to accept the *fait accompli* with as good a grace as possible, fortress Falklands being untenable in the long term—to give credit to the Foreign Office it understood that—and that the Prime Minister was panicked by the popular press and Back Benchers.

Considering the litany of occasions that Franks reveals, and knowing what she did, there is no explanation of why the Prime Minister failed to warn and act and was content to allow nothing to be done. It might have been fine had she not contrived to give the impression of taking a malleable attitude and then adopting the astoundingly hard attitude of sending a task force. In life and diplomacy it is accepted that to compromise after a hard line is acceptable. What is bordering on the criminal is to take a hard line, having given the impression of compromise and a soft line. That is what

people mean by 'luring on to the punch'.

Out of the blue, it appears from page 43, paragraph 147, referring to Friday, 5 March 1982, that John Ure, assistant Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for North and South America, recorded that the cabinet office had said that the Prime Minister would like the next defence committee paper on the Falklands to include annexes on both civil and military contingency plans. A Prime Minister who claims that the crisis came out of the blue on Wednesday, 31 March was asking for contingency plans 26 days earlier. Again, by what semantics of the English language can that be explained?

Disclosure of the truth, as Solzhenitsyn put it, cannot be wrong. In sum, point C is to ask, what is the Prime Minister's explanation of her behaviour in the light of what Franks says that she knew from intelligence and Foreign Office sources? Her answer on 26 October is a travesty of the English language and a gross, purposeful and wilful misleading of the House of Commons.

Point D is, how does the Prime Minister's answer to the House on 26 October approximate to the truth? Point E is on the related issue of just when the Government knew about the preparations for the Argentine invasion. I am inclined to believe—I say 'inclined to believe'—the statement of the Argentine General, Gugliamelli, that the decision to invade was taken on 12 January 1982. Be that as it may, it is certain that the post-Franks notion that the Argentines had not made invasion plans until two, three or four days before the event and that therefore no one could have foretold the attack and that the British Government must be exonerated, is unreal.

I assert that there were secret reports from MI6 agents in Buenos Aires, whose presence incidentally is referred to in *The Scotsman* of 17 January by Alexander MacLeod in his truly remarkable disclosure of what was in the Franks report before that was available. The previous day's publication gave a clear picture of the build-up to the invasion and on that, because of the delicate nature of the question, I ask the Minister simply to acknowledge that MI6 in Buenos Aires performed

its task properly.

On 17 January in *The Scotsman* Alexander MacLeod wrote:

In the week or ten days before the invasion, dispatches from the British Embassy in Argentina, secret reports by MI6 agents in Buenos Aires, urgent messages from the skipper of the patrol ship *HMS Endurance*.

That was in the public print.

I refer to the letter of 28 February 1983 from the Foreign Secretary which says:

Thank you for your letter of 22 February about a report in the Buenos Aires newspaper *La Razon* concerning the alleged timing of the Junta's decision to invade the Falkland Islands.

I have so far only seen summaries of the article. It claims that, at the meeting on 12 January 1982, referred to in *The Guardian's* article enclosed in your letter, the Junta secretly set up a military working group to consider the feasibility of such an invasion, that a tentative date later in the year was suggested for an invasion attempt; that this date was subsequently brought forward to May 1982; and that finally in the light of events in South Georgia in the latter part of March, it was decided to launch an invasion on 1 April (then changed again to the 2 April).

I understand that the newspaper gave no sources for these assertions. It would be unwise to take such a story at face value. But even if the story were true, there would be no inconsistency between it and the conclusion of the Franks Report that the decision to invade on 2 April was taken at a very late stage, and probably (as paragraph 263 states) 'in the light of the South Georgia situation'.

Yours sincerely,
Francis Pym.

It beggars belief to anyone who knows South America

that the ramshackle Argentine military establishment could have mounted an invasion at a few days notice even given that there were exercises.

We return to the security and intelligence services because they gave warnings. I have heard that, so concerned were the intelligence services and the Foreign Office that they persuaded, at an early stage, the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr Ridley) to approach the Opposition Front Bench and plead with them to support leaseback in the House some days before the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury made the statement for which he was mauled by the House of Commons.

Point F — this has to be cleared up — is either true or untrue. If it is true, who was approached? Was it those who had considered the Falkland Islands in the Labour Cabinet Sub-Committee, and what, if it is true, did they say? I have been told that the passage in my book *One Man's Falklands*,* dealing with the Ridley initiative, which I submitted to Lord Franks at his request, is incomplete in that it omits the then Minister of State at the Foreign Office having approached the official Opposition to ask for their support on leaseback. For the sake of the officials involved, if for nobody else, this matter ought to be cleared up. Before going on to March 1982 it is necessary to ask questions about the control of nuclear weapons in the light of the following facts. First, on 28 March, three days before the Prime Minister told the Commons that the Falklands crisis had come out of the blue, the crew of the RFA *Fort Austin* were informed by the barmaids of Gibraltar that they were going not home to Britain after five and a half months in the sweltering Gulf but to the south Atlantic. Secondly, on March 29, ships and RFA vessels on Exercise Springtrain were ordered south. Thirdly, a number of those vessels carried nuclear weapons. Fourthly, some of the ships left Portsmouth in early April carrying nuclear weapons. Fifthly, there was a row of gargantuan proportions about this in parts of Whitehall, as a result of which some, though not all, the nuclear weapons were offloaded from the ships

**One Man's Falklands* (Cecil Woolf, London, 1982).

when they were at sea, before they got to the western approaches. Sixthly, the Stenor Inspector and the Stenor Seasearch have been trying to retrieve nuclear devices from the tombs of HMS *Sheffield* and HMS *Coventry*.

Seventhly, there is also the problem of lost nuclear depth charges from two lost Sea King mark 4 and two lost Sea King mark 5 helicopters. Eighthly, the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr Speed), the former Navy Minister, who lost his post, opined on 'News Night' that he would be most surprised if the fleet were not carrying nuclear weapons.

Point G is whether our security services let our American allies know in advance that we British were taking nuclear weapons into their hemisphere against protocol 1 of the Treaty of Tlatelolco of which both Britain and the Americans are signatories. The related question is, what do we now say as British people to the non-aligned nations which, meeting in Delhi, asked us to remove nuclear weapons from land and sea areas around the Falklands? It is all very well to say that we would never have used nuclear weapons. That seems to be the received wisdom. However, can we be quite sure? Let us suppose, heaven help us, that *Invincible*, *Hermes* or *Canberra*, hit by a torpedo which actually exploded, had gone down with a loss of life comparable to the sinking of the *Belgrano*. There might have been an irresistible demand, in a losing situation, to go ahead—as was, indeed, discussed in certain quarters—to bomb granaries and airports in Argentina. Those who have nuclear weapons in desperate situations may be tempted not to be too choosy about how they use them. The whole operation was a hideous gamble, with no long-term prize for this country.

Point H asks, first, what British policy is on explaining taking nuclear weapons to the south Atlantic in the first place, and secondly, what British policy is on the current existence of nuclear weapons in and around the Falkland Islands.

Before turning to the crucial question of the sinking of the *Belgrano*, which moved the war from second to fifth gear and is the source of many of the lasting,

seemingly intransigent problems that we now face, I should point out that there has been no ministerial attempt to answer, point by point, the issues that I first raised on 21 December, and have raised several times since then. Had Ministers seen fit to give a point-by-point candid response to that debate at any time in the past three months, either in the House or by detailed letter or written answer, they might have saved themselves a good deal of trouble. Late in December I wrote to the previous Secretary of State as follows:

Dear John,

It was nice of you on 21st December to tell me that you had read my book, *One Man's Falklands* and to make courteous comment. However I do not agree that in any sense I went 'over the top' in my speech that evening. In column 903, you interrupted this speech to say, 'I think I should say to the hon. Gentleman as he is making these charges that a very, very large proportion of what he has said is just totally and completely untrue'. Now, without trying to be clever, clever about it, because these matters are far too serious for cheap point scoring, a very, very large proportion of what I said came directly or indirectly from Parliamentary answers, given by MoD, the Foreign Office or the Prime Minister. When you interrupted, and I gave way, it occurred to me to ask you there and then IN WHAT PARTICULAR RESPECTS you thought what I said was totally and completely untrue.

I was only deterred by Pat Duffy, fuming away, wanting to be called and the fact that I had already spoken for 25 minutes.

I concluded the letter by saying:

But before the Cabinet re-shuffle that we read about, I would like to invite you to write to me, specifying exactly what you had in mind.

He never did so. I shall not start criticising individuals, or the former Secretary of State for Defence. However, on 29 December *The Scotsman* contained an article by Mr Keith Aitken saying:

Mr Dalyell has now written inviting Mr Nott to specify which of his claims were based on false information.

Apart from the horror of what happened over the *Belgrano*, which has been revived by Argentine parents coming to Europe—a horror, incidentally, shared by many sailors in the Royal Navy—and the political consequences that rumble on throughout Latin America to Britain's disadvantage, the Prime Minister's actions on Monday, 2 May reveal that the Prime Minister is not a fit person to lead a British Government. If that is thought to be extreme, hon. Members should consider the facts.

First, we are told that the *Belgrano* was sunk under the rules of engagement. That is what Parliament, the press and the public were led to believe on 4 and 5 May. Indeed, at the bottom of c. 900 on 21 December I referred to the statement of 5 May in the *Official Report* at c. 156:

The actual decision to launch a torpedo was clearly one taken by the submarine commander. — [*Official Report*, 21 December 1982; Vol. 34, c. 900.]

Yet on 5 July Commander Christopher Wreford Brown returned to Faslane and let the cat out of the bag. He did it, he said, on instructions from Northwood. He was a first-time submarine commander.

What is the explanation of the statement by the Secretary of State for Defence on 4 and 5 May? It contains a litany of lies. The first was that the *Belgrano* had been sunk under the rules of engagement. No, it was sunk on orders from Northwood. I shall go into this in detail.

Secondly, that the *Belgrano* and escorts were con-

verging on units of the task force. No, not at all, it was going 'West-north-west'. No units of the task force or task group—I understand the difference between the two—were to the west of where the *Belgrano* was sunk.

Thirdly, he said that contact would be lost over the Burdwood Bank. Again, that was false. The shallowest area of the Burdwood Bank is 25 fathoms—that is 150 odd feet of water—and the average is 90 fathoms—540 feet of water. The *Belgrano* was sunk outside the Burdwood Bank going in the other direction by at least 50 nautical miles. That is 59 miles outside any conceivable limit of the exclusion zone. So that is not so.

Fourthly, that it was a threat to the task force, it was not. We know that the range of the M38 Exocets, because we were part manufacturers, was 20 miles. I refer to the questions that my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr Newens) was putting this afternoon about arms.

Fifthly, the pincer movement involving the carrier, the *25 De Mayo*. No, the carrier and escorts were in port. I assert that American and our intelligence knew that to be so. I shall go into this matter in detail.

Sixthly, the *Conqueror* detected the *Belgrano* on 2 May. That is contained in paragraph 110 of the White Paper. No, it was on 1 May or possibly 30 April. Members of the crew, with whom I have been in contact, say that *The Sunday Times* book and the Jenkins and Hastings book are correct on this crucial point.

One wonders why there is that inaccuracy in the White Paper and in Admiral Fieldhouse's report. Confronted with half a dozen significant and substantial deceptions and one excuse after another that is being produced when the previous excuse has failed, one begins to wonder. Between the siting of the *Belgrano* on 1 May or possibly 30 April and the order to sink, the Prime Minister was confronted with a peace compromise that most of the world and the Labour Opposition would have expected her to accept. What was at risk at that moment were not the ships of the British fleet but the Conservative Party's leadership.

Point I: why are there such discrepancies in the parliamentary answers? I understand that Simon Jenkins

has written to that most excellent and serious publication the *London Review of Books* quarrelling with my review of his and Max Hastings' important and well-written book *Falklands War*, but even Simon Jenkins in his letter concludes that Ministers have not yet given a detailed response to what he calls the damaging accusation that I and others have made.

It is not sufficient to say that the admirals asked for permission because they were worried about *Belgrano* during amphibious landings or because they were worried about the carrier, *25 De Mayo*. Given the Nimrod information and the other circumstances set out in detail on 21 December, that will not do. On 25 May the carrier and the *Santissima Trinidad*, the *Hercules* and her escorts, never left Puerto Belgrano, the naval base, and Northwood and the Prime Minister knew that from the Americans, MI6 and, as I shall show, from Nimrod.

I take the solemn responsibility of charging the Prime Minister with a particular specific war crime and high misdemeanour. She gave the orders pre-lunch at Chequers on Sunday, 2 May 1982 for HMS *Conqueror* to unleash its Mark 8 torpedoes against the *Belgrano*, behind the back of her Foreign Secretary, without consulting our allies, the American Government, in the knowledge that the *Belgrano* and her escorts were at that time no conceivable threat to the task force and in the knowledge that Galtieri had ordered the withdrawal of the army from the Falklands-Malvinas on the evening of Saturday, 1 May, on the basis of the Peruvian-American United Nations Peace terms. My detailed account in *Hansard* of 21 December of how the Government's excuse for sinking the *Belgrano* are different in explanation after explanation and exposed as false has never been answered.

New and damning evidence is coming to the light of day. Members of the task force are beginning to talk. I believe that Britain had cracked the not very sophisticated codes by which the admirals in Argentina communicated with their ships at sea and, on May 1 and 2, knew precisely what were the orders to the *Belgrano* and her

escorts, the *Piedra Buena* and the *Hippolito Bouchard*. A not very difficult task was made easier by the fact that senior and middle ranking officers of the Argentine navy had been regular attenders at courses run by the Royal Navy at Portsmouth and elsewhere.

One recalls my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil (Mr Rowlands), a former Foreign Office Minister, blurting out, in the now notorious Commons debate of 3 April,

Last night the Secretary of State for Defence asked 'How can we read the mind of the enemy?' I shall make a disclosure. As well as trying to read the mind of the enemy, we have been reading its telegrams for many years.— [*Official Report*, 3 April 1982; Vol. 21, c. 650.]

Writing in *The Times* on Saturday, 15 January 1983, my hon. Friend wrote: 'Their action'—this refers to 1976 in South Thule—

created a dilemma for the Government. Preparations were already well in hand to launch a major new initiative involving my visit to the islands and to Buenos Aires to work out the terms of reference for fresh negotiations. The problem was compounded by intelligence received from sources close to the head of the Argentine Navy, Admiral Massera. Massera was the naval equivalent to Galtieri—a populist with consuming political ambition—and we knew that he would seek to use the Falklands issue to further that end.

The former and responsible Foreign Office Minister makes clear what was our understanding of Argentine intelligence and how well placed were our contacts. That is all in the public print, let alone what I have been told privately. I assert that for many years we have had excellent intelligence from Buenos Aires and, given the nature of the Argentine population—the present air force commander has the name of Hughes—

it would be surprising if this were not so.

Point J is this. Was my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil in any way wrong? In the land of Mr Juan McCafferty, a leader of the Scottish community in Argentina, of Mr Pablo Llewellyn, a leader of the Welsh community, of Brigadier Hughes, the current air force commander, or of Jock MacDonald, the Argentine ambassador to Tokyo, it is not difficult for MI6 to operate.

On 8 June, enemy aircraft attacked the landing ships *Sir Galahad* and *Sir Tristram* at Bluff Cove, and, tragically, 50 men were killed. 'We wished to conceal the extent of the casualties,' Sir Terence Lewin stated on the record, 'because we knew from intelligence that the Argentines thought that they were very much higher'.

Indeed, Lewin praises the intelligence. I simply say that I believe those who tell me that I can take it that on 8 June, as over the period to which my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil referred, we had no difficulty in picking up and decoding the messages between the Argentine mainland and their ships at sea. I am told that for hours there had been no imposition of radio silence between the *Belgrano* and her escorts before the sinking as they imagined that they were going home and that peace was breaking out.

I had better be clear and produce evidence about the Nimrods. They did 111 sorties. It is all here in Sir John Fieldhouse's supplement to the *London Gazette*. He refers to four Nimrods on page 16111 in the *London Gazette* on 14 December 1982. On page 16112, Sir John says: 'Nimrods mounted 111 sorties from the Island'. On page 16119, he gave the following important information:

Nimrod aircraft were the first to be based on Ascension Island, on 6 April. They were immediately involved as communications links for the transitting nuclear submarines and thereafter they continually provided direct support and area surveillance to every major element of the Task Force to the limit of the aircraft's range. All deployments of small aircraft

were provided with airborne search and rescue cover and, after the fitting of refuelling probes, Nimrods converted for air to air refuelling provided long range surveillance of the sea areas between the Falkland Islands and the Argentinian mainland prior to and during the main amphibious landing.

The Nimrods have twin Marconi AD470 HF transceivers, which are easily able to intercept radio messages. The Nimrods also have encryption facilities for sending coded messages in flight. Therefore, they could have transmitted the messages between the *Belgrano* and the mainland back to Northwood, the task force and thence quickly to the Prime Minister.

A few years ago, I had the good fortune to fly in a Nimrod from St Mawgan. I marvelled at the search capability of this flying electronic laboratory. What I am saying is well known. *Flight International* of 15 May 1982 says the following:

On May 8 a further 20 Harriers and Sea Harriers were air-refuelled direct to Ascension Island in a record nine-hour flight. A number of Nimrod Mk 2s have been fitted with in-flight refuelling probes, and after a hasty evaluation at Boscombe Down have deployed to Ascension. With in-flight refuelling and fuel conservation by shutting down two engines, the Nimrods should have a useful five or six hours on station in the Falklands area.

There was no difficulty from the Ascension base because of the refuelling. They were almost as good as the American AWACs.

Point (1) is: were we reading the signals between the Argentine mainland and the *Belgrano*? If we were, did we know that they were under orders to return to Uschaia? If we did know, when was that knowledge made available to responsible Ministers?

I also believe that the *Hippolito Bouchard* knew well for many hours where the SSN was. The sonar equipment on that ship is the extremely sensitive SQS 30

and the SQA 10. There is nothing secret about this. *Jane's Fighting Ships* says that the sonar of the *Piedra Buena* and the *Hippolito Bouchard* is the SQS 30 and the SQA 10 (VDS) and that their radar is the SPS 6 and the SPS 40. It is inconceivable that the Argentine officers did not know of the presence of the huge SSN, which is not as silent as the O-class, a mere 4,000 yards away. That is the distance when the mark 8 torpedo was fired. Furthermore, most of the victims were in the ship's canteen or in the sleeping quarters, according to page 34 of *The Sunday Times* of 17 October 1982. Does not that show that Captain Hector Bonzo of *Belgrano* believed that the war was over? That would be consistent with the orders.

We now know what the orders from Argentina to its ships were, not least because Admiral Inaya—the navy member of the junta—has been bitterly and publicly rebuked by the pilots of the Aviacon Naval, the Argentine equivalent of the Fleet Air Arm, who showed courage and skill in the conflict, for his treachery in issuing orders. They were that the *Belgrano*, the *Piedra Buena* and the *Hippolito Bouchard* should return to their home port of Uschaia, and that is precisely what they were doing, on a 280 degree course west-north-west towards the entrance of the Straits of Magellan, when the *Conqueror* struck some 50 miles outside the exclusion zone.

In making the charge that Northwood had deciphered and could read the instructions from Inaya, given in the belief that peace was certain, I am not saying anything that I have not said before to Ministers' faces. During the public expenditure debate on Wednesday, 9 March, when we dealt with MI5 and MI6 under the Foreign Office Vote, I made similar statements. No reply was given in the wind-up—I do not complain too much about that—and no reply has been given since then. Point M is why has there been no response to my speech in the House on 9 March, and not a cheep out of Ministers?

At a meeting on Tuesday of last week with some of my hon. Friends and myself, at the request of

Ambassador Luebbbers, to explain the position of the United States of America in Guatemala and Nicaragua, he let the cat out of the bag by saying, quite nicely, that the British should be grateful not only for Sidewinder—without which the Falklands war might have been a military defeat for Britain—but for the intelligence. Ministers' references to pincer movements by the carrier *25 de Mayo* and her escorts the *Santissima Trinidad* and the *Hercules* are codswallop, because we know from satellite pictures that they never left port during the period that the *Belgrano* was being followed by HMS *Conqueror*.

The White Paper statement that *Conqueror* detected the *Belgrano* on 2 May is simply not right. Members of the crew have confirmed that both *The Sunday Times* book and Hastings and Jenkins are right to say that the *Conqueror* had *Belgrano* in her sights from 1 May, or even 30 April.

Point O is how do the Government explain Ambassador Luebbbers' comments? Can we make any interpretation other than what has been said frequently: that we had access to American satellite data? I visited the University of East Anglia recently. Using computational geometry, it is very easy, from satellite pictures of such quality, to build up pictures of where iron-clad ships are.

The crime of the Prime Minister is that she ordered the sinking of the *Belgrano*, not out of military necessity or even for military advantage, but because she was faced with a political compromise involving the withdrawal of all forces from the Falklands, which the rest of the world would have expected her to accept. The paramount threat was not to the fleet, but that the present Foreign Secretary might replace her in Downing Street. Now, as the weeks go by, it becomes clear in Delhi, at the United Nations and elsewhere, that Britain will not be forgiven for the *Belgrano* and that, in the absence of negotiations about sovereignty, there will, probably in 1984 or 1985, be what one might call, dreadfully, a 'replay', with yet more young British and Argentine blood spilt. Responsibility for such a tragedy

will lie in the ruthless domestic politicking of the Prime Minister.

I had a two-hour conversation this week with Germán Sopena, the Paris correspondent of *La Pienza*, who is reported in *The Sunday Times* under the heading 'Torpedo sank peace hopes':

The President of Peru, Belaunde Terry, has confirmed that his attempts to prevent the Falkland War failed because the British torpedoed the cruiser *General Belgrano*, killing 368 Argentinians, as negotiations were taking place. Speaking for the first time of his intervention, he has told an Argentinian journalist, Germán Sopena, how shocked he was at hearing the news.

The rest of that is in *The Sunday Times*, 20 March 1983.

The whole sequence of events in the Peruvian peace plan was outlined in my book *One Man's Falklands*. Although the Foreign Office was sufficiently interested to send a despatch rider to the home of my publishers, Cecil Woolf and Jean Moorcroft Wilson, to get a pre-publication copy, ostensibly for a Cabinet Minister, no one has yet denied my account of the interlocking between the Peruvian peace plan and sinking of the *Belgrano*.

Sopena told me that President Belaunde Terry told him that both he and the Americans suggested that after *Sheffield* had been sunk, in a sense tit for the *Belgrano* tat, his peace plan could have been reactivated. However, by that time, Buenos Aires did not want that because of the shock at the loss of young life, and the British just wanted to continue to fight.

When I say that the British wanted to fight, I do not refer to most of the servicemen who had to do the actual fighting. Read Lieutenant David Tinker on that. It was the Prime Minister, the loudmouthed idiots on the safety of these green Benches who yelled her on, and some equally strident and shallow journalists operating from the safety of Fleet Street. Those were the people yelling her on, not those down in the South Atlantic.

Thirty years ago, in a tank crew in the Rhine Army, I was only too conscious of what it would be like to be brewed up in a tank by shells from guns that one could not see. No sailor, soldier or airman wants to take part in an Exocet war if he can avoid it, and the Falklands could easily have been avoided. The conditions for a just war were not met, and the conditions are that every step taken by the politicians should avoid war. Furthermore, the whole concept of proportionality became absurd, considering that the issue now is 1,800 people, and numbers do matter.

We should have at least let the Peruvian initiative run to the end. If it is thought that I am off beam and an eccentric in what I am saying, I just quote Hugo Young in *The Sunday Times*, who said that a Cabinet Minister had explained to him that the purpose of the apparently intense search for peace was to make the British understand that they had to go to war. On the whole, the Minister said that it was a 'great relief to the Cabinet that, by the time that the British settlement offer was made, the Argentinians were in no mood to talk'. How serious and sincere were the Government in their attempts to avoid having to regain the islands by force?

From a very early stage, the Prime Minister perceived an opportunity, having established Britain as an injured party, to test our military preparedness. Reconciliation is not a word in the Prime Minister's vocabulary. Before anybody sneers, I point out that I was one of the very few Members of Parliament on either side of the House to take the trouble to see the right hon. Lady when she properly made the offer on 20 April to see hon. Members. I went to see her on 21 April.

There have been differences of judgment on the Falklands between some of us on the Opposition's Back Benches and some of the members of the Shadow Cabinet. There should be no differences about the need to establish the veracity of the Prime Minister. An investigation would have been mounted from the Floor of a previous House of Commons—which my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr Sheldon) and I can possibly remember 20 years ago—by some of

the old friends of myself and my right hon. Friend the Member for Ebbw Vale (Mr Foot). I wonder what Dick Crossman or Sydney Silverman, George Wigg or Leslie Hale in their heyday would have done to stop a Prime Minister from getting away with so many unanswered questions and with such an unconvincing interpretation of events. I remember what some of my hon. Friends did over *Hola*. My first Opposition leader, Hugh Gaitskell, would have interrogated any Prime Minister in such a position. So would my right hon. Friend the Member for Huyton (Sir H. Wilson) in the years 1963-64. In circumstances that I believe to be more disreputable than *Rambouillet* or *Suez*, I ask the shadow Cabinet to make sure that these allegations get at least a proper reply. Silence by the Government throughout the recess can only be construed now as assent to what I am saying.

If all this were simply a matter of history, if relations between Britain and Argentina were on the way to being patched up, if there seemed to be any prospect of a return to normality, there might be a case for saying that I and others should let bygones be bygones and let sleeping dogs lie. Alas, far from improving the British situation, predictably and predicted, foreseeably and foreseen, it is getting worse. The £880 million for Stanley airport is only the most dramatic item of expenditure in a horrendous list of costs associated with *Fortress Falklands*. The outcome was rightly perceived by the Foreign Office, and in my view rightly perceived by Lord Carrington.

As with the Americans in Vietnam, the facts of geography are against us.

I am glad, at a time when the rest of the political life of this nation has its eyes fixed on *Darlington*, not *Westminster*, to place this considered proposition before the House of Commons. The circumstances, the facts and, in many cases, the hard evidence that I have placed before the House, are of such a nature than an inquiry into the conduct of the *Falklands* conflict, taking into account the precedent of the inquiry into the *Crimean War* and the inquiry into the *Jameson raid* during the

Boer War, is warranted.

The picture that emerges is that of a Prime Minister who opted for war on occasion after occasion. I think just of 7 April, when Alexander Haig was actually mid-air on his way to see us, when she declared the military exclusion zone. That was a provocative act. She might at least have waited until the American Secretary of State had had his say. I think, too, of South Georgia and all that, and Jenkins and Hastings with their description of Goose Green. If ever there was a politicians' battle, Goose Green was it. Again and again the Prime Minister opted for war, when she should have had peace with honour. We see a Prime Minister who, for domestic political reasons, wanted military victory just as Galtieri, for his own discreditable reasons, wanted to invade the Falklands, in a situation where there was no military solution to be had in the long term.

In particular, the burden of proof is now on the Prime Minister to refute the charge, supported by fact and in detail, that knowing the orders to the *Belgrano* to return to port, knowing the seriousness of intent of the withdrawal of forces by Argentina, and of their orders, knowing that there would be huge casualties among young men, without telling—let alone consulting—our American allies, without warning the Foreign Secretary—possibly egged on by Lewin and Fieldhouse, I know not, who must have known perfectly well at the time of the sinking of the *Belgrano* that it was no threat to their task force—for the sake of her own political position or reputation, let loose a slaughter, the effects of which are still reverberating around the world, to the disadvantage of our country.

Quite quietly tonight I say to the House that the Prime Minister must seek a parliamentary opportunity to reply to the charge of war crime and high misdemeanour. When I gave oral evidence to the Franks committee, Lord Franks said that some tangential comments, referring to events after 2 April, could not be taken into account. Even last week when I went to Independent Radio News I was asked why I went on about the *Belgrano*, since Franks had exonerated the

Government. If the IRN commentators do not realise that Franks did not cover the *Belgrano*, how many others who are not commentators are in the same position?

There should be set up a commission of inquiry into the conduct of the Falklands war, taking into account the precedents. Such an inquiry would perhaps reveal that the Prime Minister has misled the House of Commons to an extent that it has never been misled before. If it had been Harold Macmillan, the Prime Minister when I came into Parliament, or Alec Douglas-Home or the right hon. Member for Sidcup (Mr Heath), it is exceedingly unlikely that I would ever have been making a speech of this kind.

I do not think that anything like this episode has happened during the parliamentary lifetime of any of us. It has probably been established that the security services and the Foreign Office performed properly. Is not the evidence that the head of Government misled the House of Commons sufficiently disturbing to warrant an inquiry? If the Prime Minister is innocent of all this or of most of it, she should in her own self-interest institute an inquiry. That is what the debate asks for.

3. St Francis in the USA

I initiate this Adjournment debate on the circumstances surrounding the sinking of the *Belgrano* not simply to harp back on history. If all this were history and had no effect on the future I might have been a great deal quieter than I am now.

I start by considering a dreadful scenario which was put to me again only last week by Alain Guegnon when he interviewed me and others for Radio Televisione Francais. He said that the week before he had been in Argentina to interview politicians—Alfonsin and senior Peronists—a number of the military and even ex-President Galtieri, under house arrest. Guegnon's scenario was that there would probably be no bee sting attack, although there could be low intensity operations against our forces involving enormous expense, at any rate until elections had taken place in Argentina. It was his opinion and mine, for what little it is worth on this, that a civilian Government, although they would be under considerable pressure from the military establishment to do something and might wish to see that military establishment thinking about what they call the Malvinas rather than a counter coup against an infant Parliament in Buenos Aires, would do nothing.

It is the opinion of French experts and, indeed, of some Latin Americans that such is the chaos in Argentina that within six to nine months a civilian Government will get into terrible trouble. The military will feel that they have to come back, that they want to come back and, said Guegnon and other people, there will then be real danger because the one popular cause that will unite left, right and centre, military and civilian, is a saving of Argentine honour in relation to what the Argentines see as their Malvinas. Therefore my activity is directed, above all else, towards warning about a second Falklands-Malvinas war. That is why it is important to return to the circumstances surrounding the *Belgrano*.

I was surprised by the Prime Minister's response to question No. 4 this afternoon. I understood her to say

that news of the Peruvian proposals had not reached London until after the attack. I do not think that I have that wrong. But if that is true, what was the Foreign Secretary doing in Washington and New York? My understanding—and I ask to be corrected if it is not right—is that the Foreign Secretary knew of the Peruvian plans at least six and a half hours earlier.

Whatever may be said about Mr Peter Snow in public print, he is an extremely careful journalist. Members of the BBC 'Newsnight' team do not tread such delicate ground without checking and counter-checking. They do not simply take my word. I must repeat what was said on 29 April on 'Newsnight'. The transcript states:

It was now 12 hours before the attack on the *Belgrano* . . . and by this time there was a further development in Buenos Aires: according to the Peruvians a call came through in the early hours of Sunday from the Argentine capital: it was General Galtieri for President Belaunde. He said that he accepted the Peruvian plan and would put it to his junta that afternoon . . . At breakfast time in Washington Haig and Pym had a long meeting. Our American source tells us that it was now clear to Haig that Mr Pym wanted a settlement, and was working hard for it.

To the best of my belief, the BBC's American sources were different from mine. Mr Snow continued:

We're told that Mr Haig personally phoned Mrs Thatcher. So, according to the Peruvians and the Americans Britain was aware—at the highest level—of all that had developed at the time they were getting up from lunch at Chequers: now what no one is telling us is exactly when the war cabinet at Chequers made its decision to give the Navy the green light for the *Conqueror* to attack the *Belgrano* but whether or not the full reported details of President Galtieri's alleged acceptance of the plan were known to Mrs Thatcher when she finally said

Yes to Commander Wreford Brown

the commander of the *Conqueror*—

there should have been time to attempt to call the mission off in the intervening five hours.

Is the Newsnight report accurate? If it is not, I hope that this opportunity will be taken to spell that out.

A remarkable article has been written by Mr Paul Foot in the current issue of *New Statesman*. It is best to be candid, and I do not hide from the House the fact that after my long speech on 21 December about the circumstances of the sinking of the *Belgrano* Mr Paul Foot, together with a number of other journalists, came to cross-examine me. As a result, I urged him, and he finally decided, to go to Lima.

This is the evidence not of someone who has written an article off the top of his head in *New Statesman*, but the carefully considered writing of a journalist with a track record of considerable success, care, and accuracy—whatever some people may say about his political views. I have known him for 20 years since he was a reporter with the Scottish *Daily Record* in Glasgow, and he is an outstanding professional journalist. We ought to listen to his description in the current issue of *New Statesman* on Sunday, 2 May. He said that

optimism was increased considerably when Galtieri phoned Belaunde in the early morning. The high command, he said, was almost unanimous in approving the terms, though there were a number of small points to be negotiated.

Throughout that morning, Belaunde negotiated these points in calls to Washington and Buenos Aires.

In Washington, General Haig was in close touch with Francis Pym (he was probably in the same room for most of the time—certainly the two men had lunch together).

I gather they had breakfast together. It is extraordinary

that the Prime Minister should say this afternoon that news of the Peruvian proposals did not reach London until after the attack. The implication is that her Foreign Secretary was doing all this, closeted with Haig, and that not a word had seeped through to Downing Street. Are we to believe that? If we are, it indicates mind-boggling incompetence which, as a defender of the Foreign Office, I do not think it is capable of.

Foot continued:

The proposals were amended. 'Points of view and wishes' of the islanders was changed to 'needs and aspirations'. The membership of the contact group was left open, though it was suggested that Canada might come in for the US and Venezuela for Peru.

By noon, an agreement seemed secure. A final draft of a treaty was prepared by officials who had been at work in the 18th-century Torre Tagli mansion (the headquarters of the Peruvian Foreign Office) since the early hours. It was drawn up for signature by the British and Argentine Ambassadors in Lima. The ceremony, it was confidently expected, would take place that night.

I should like to know, as would many other people, precisely what instructions were given to ambassador Charles Wallace. In his *Daily Mirror* article last Thursday Mr Paul Foot referred to something of which I had no notion, that is, that there was a treaty, bound in red leather, ready for signature. Are we to believe that Downing Street knew nothing about this?

In the *New Statesman* article Foot continued:

General Galtieri, who had been given the go-ahead for these preparations, made it clear that he must first get the approval of his official junta meeting, scheduled for 5 pm that afternoon. But, he insisted, the agreement of the junta was a formality.

This is confirmed by the *Sunday Times* Insight book on the Falklands war, which quotes a 'senior official' of the Argentinian Foreign Ministry as saying,

'I was in the room when Foreign Secretary Costa Mendes came in and said: "We have an agreement. We can accept this". Everybody was very excited.'

Once the junta meeting started in Buenos Aires, President Belaunde decided to hold his weekly press conference, which had been long delayed. At 4.45 pm, he went in front of the cameras with his Prime Minister and Foreign Minister to tell the world that a settlement was at hand 'this very night'. All three men made it quite plain that a settlement was imminent.

Indeed, the COI's recent guests from *El Comercio*, the *Financial Times* of Lima, talked freely to me about this. They have very close links with El Gaucho and the Peruvian military. Foot's article continued:

Very soon after the press conference, these high hopes were dashed. News came in of the sinking of the *Belgrano* some three and a half hours earlier . . . Communications were slow, since the cruiser's signalling systems were destroyed and its escorts and the submarine wanted to protect their positions.

I am leaving out some of the article because of the limited time. Later he said:

At 6.30 pm, Foreign Minister Arias Stella received the Ambassadors of Britain (Mr Charles Wallace) and Argentina (Mr Louis Sanchez Mareno). Perhaps they came to sign the treaty. They were told the bad news and left.

Is it true that the British ambassador in Lima turned up expecting to sign a treaty? If it is not, I think that we should be told precisely what the truth is. I for one would very much like to hear the Foreign Office's view of the statements in *New Statesman*, to which I referred publicly when addressing a point of order to Mr Speaker, thereby giving warning to the Foreign Secretary's office. Accordingly, I hope that these remarks are not coming out of the blue to the Minister.

Foot says:

The Belaunde proposals, it is safe to conclude, were taken seriously by both sides. They were drawn up into a treaty which was expected to be signed. And they were put to flight by the sinking of the *Belgrano*.

Senor Arias Stella, who is a fellow of the Royal Society of Pathologists in London and has no anti-British feeling, generously ascribes the *Belgrano* sinking to military accident. He told me that he and all his colleagues had assumed that some hothead submarine commander had let fly at the cruiser without any idea of the state of negotiations in Lima, Buenos Aires and Washington.

Commander Wreford Brown was no hothead submarine commander. He let the cat out of the bag when he came back to Faslane on the west coast of Scotland on 5th July and told friends of mine, reputable members of the Scottish press corps—Eric Mackenzie of the *Scotsman* and *The Aberdeen Press and Journal*—that he was a first-time submarine commander. He had not acted on his own initiative. He had acted on orders from Northwood. I do not agree in this instance with the generous Peruvian view that it was a hothead submarine commander who was responsible.

Foot states:

The seven-point plan had been agreed between Haig and Belaunde the previous night (in Britain, the early hours of the morning). Was it conveyed to Chequers that night? Did the War Cabinet meeting not have before it 'the latest from Francis in Washington'? Even if they did not, they knew that Pym had gone to Washington in a last bid for peace. However hopeless such a mission seemed in the eyes of the hawks in the war cabinet (and by all accounts they were all hawks, except Pym), they knew that the armed forces could not be seen to cut the ground from under the Foreign Secretary's feet.

On arrival in Washington the previous evening, Mr

Pym gave an impromptu press conference. He explained that the attacks on the Falklands that day had been intended to concentrate the Argentines' mind on a peaceful settlement. He went on: 'No further military action is envisaged at the moment, except to keep the exclusion zone secure.' (*Times*, 2 May 1982.) This pledge was kept—right up to the sinking of the *Belgrano*.

At the very least, then the Cabinet that Sunday morning knew that Pym was trying for peace and that a period of calm was vital if he was seen to be trying. That is the background, apparently, in which they gave the order to attack a ship on the high seas, with a complement of 1,000 men, when it was outside the war zone that they themselves had designated.

I just ask that there should be continuing study of the rest of what Foot has said. In the meantime I have tabled a parliamentary question for tomorrow, which the Foreign Office is free to answer or not to answer. It reads:

Pursuant to her answer of 12 May, by what means the Peruvian proposals reached London, and whether Her Majesty's Ambassador in Lima negotiated with the Government of Peru with the approval of Her Majesty's Government prior to any intimation of those proposals arriving in London?

I hope that there will be some answer given to that. I cannot believe that ambassador Wallace was acting entirely on his own.

I referred to the important article in the *Daily Mirror*, which was written by the man who was there. It states:

Frantic diplomatic activity in the eighteenth-century mansion which is the headquarters of the Peruvian Foreign Office.

The most experienced diplomats in the service had been working all day on the draft treaty, erasing old clauses and inserting new ones as the talks went on.

Now they prepared the final document.

It was couched in all the necessary diplomatic protocol, and bound in red leather. Spaces were left for the signatures of the British and Argentine ambassadors.

Ministers swarmed into the presidential palace. The American ambassador, Mr Frank Ortiz, was there all afternoon.

Had all of that gone unbeknown to our Prime Minister? Are we expected to believe that? What were the instructions to Charles Wallace? The implication is that he was acting off his own bat. I find it curious to understand what senior diplomats may have been doing. 'Seven Days to Victory', the Timescan publication, says:

Sir Nicholas Henderson was about to give a press conference when he heard the news of the attack from American Secretary of State Alexander Haig. Reporters say that he had lost his normally urbane manner and appeared white and shocked.

I asked Sir Nicholas Henderson, whom I have seen at Konigswinton on several occasions, about it, and of course it was understood between us that he could not talk about the matter. I hope that it is no discourtesy — and certainly none is intended to him — when I say that I was astonished that I should be asked to give evidence to Franks and that neither Anthony Parsons nor Nicholas Henderson were, but that is by the way.

This afternoon, the Prime Minister — I think I have her words correctly — said that the *Belgrano* was sunk for military reasons and that the threat was real. Not at the time of sinking it was not, I say, because if we are to be convinced of that, we need to have the previous course for 48 hours. There has been a whole tissue of inaccuracies.

On 'The World at One', Mr Ted Harrison presented an interesting programme reminding us of a clip from Mr Nott, that the *Belgrano* had been detected at 8 pm. That was the first of a number of small inaccuracies and was

part of larger inaccuracies; small truths as part of larger truths. We had the business of Faslane and the commander hoisting the jolly roger and saying that he did not act under the rules of engagement. The actions must have been known to the Prime Minister because the commander was directly under the command of Northwood, as were all the other submarines. As I understand it, the submarines were not under the command of the task force commander. One cannot establish that by way of parliamentary questions because it is an operational matter.

It is said that the *Belgrano* and her escorts were detected either on Saturday, 1 May or possibly on Friday, 30 April; that appears in *The Sunday Times* book. It is also the view of the crew to whom I talked, as well as appearing in Hastings and Jenkins, who are no friends of mine in this matter. That completely contradicts Fieldhouse's report and the statement in paragraph 110 of the White Paper:

On 2nd May, HMS *Conqueror* detected the Argentine cruiser *General Belgrano* accompanied by two destroyers.

Not true again that the *Belgrano* and her escorts were converging on the task force. They were on a 280 degree course and, by way of a parliamentary question, it was established that there were no units of the task force—or task group; I understand the distinction between the two—west of where the *Belgrano* was sunk.

We have been over the whole ridiculous business of the Burdwood bank, and that has been exposed. We have been into the whole question of the pincer movement and the *Veintecinco de Mayo*, and that has been exposed. If I am told by the Minister that I am wrong in all I am saying, it is up to him to give the *Belgrano*'s course and that of her escorts in the previous 48 hours, because there was no military threat and the sinking was political.

What we really must establish is the gap, in technical terms, between the sending of the message to *Conqueror* and its time of reception. At what time did the captain

of *Conqueror* receive the order to sink the *Belgrano*? How continuously well informed were the authorisers of the sinking? What was the timing of the despatch of the authorisation to fire the torpedo in relation to any incoming news that agreement was being reached on the basis formulated by the Peruvian Government and that it was imminent?

If the Government knew that agreement was imminent and sent instructions, I concede it is different from sending instructions with the knowledge that the agreement was imminent. The timing in this matter is important. I asked the Government when they heard that agreement was close and what was the timing in relation to the despatch of the authorisation to sink and whether that authorisation was given before or after it was known that the Peruvian agreement was so close.

I believe that the real threat to the Prime Minister then was not the threat of the *Belgrano* and her escorts to the task force but the treaty which was to be bound in red leather. If it is said that this is just the hon. Member for West Lothian on his hobby horse, I must refer to today's *Daily Mirror*. I have given notice of this matter. The passage to which I refer is on page 7. To save time, I should welcome a statement of the inaccuracies in the article '*Belgrano: How much did Thatcher know?*' let us be told if the *Daily Mirror* has it entirely wrong.

The treaty involved the withdrawal by Argentine forces—the object of the exercise in the beginning—and the withdrawal of the task force. If the task force had been turned round, it is the judgment of many of us that many influential members of the Conservative party would have been wanting another leader. The paramount threat was to the occupancy of Downing Street.

I assert that when Haig and Pym telephoned the Prime Minister with what they thought was peace, her reaction soon after receiving the messages about the state of the Argentine military that I assert she did receive—from American sources and MI6, which was not that incompetent and the Nimrod A470 Marconi transceivers, to which I have referred previously—was one of horror on hearing that agreement on the treaty

was so close. She saw the threat to her position. She telephoned Northwood and said, 'Sink the *Belgrano*'. With Nimrod there are good communications with the submarines. From Fieldhouse's report we know that Nimrods were on Ascension island from 6 April and had refuelling capacity soon after. There was no difficulty in communications.

I assert that the reaction was that Saint Francis of Assisi and peace, brought about by the Foreign Secretary, must be torpedoed. I assert further that a pale, horrified and livid Foreign Secretary went to his former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Sidcup (Mr Heath)—that is why I referred to him at Question Time this afternoon—and told him the appalling story of the Prime Minister's behaviour. It was the suspicion of the relationship between her Foreign Secretary and the right hon. Member for Sidcup that partly precipitated the Prime Minister's order to sink the *Belgrano*. It is an appalling charge to make. It is not geared to the forthcoming general election because it may continue after.

I believe that the Prime Minister's first two statements this afternoon were false. Her third statement, that negotiations continued until 17 May, is ridiculous because once the *Belgrano* had been sunk negotiations were savaged.

We are told that at 10.15 pm on 2nd May—over three hours after the sinking—there was a telegram: that was the first that the Foreign Office knew about the Peruvian proposals. Apparently we are expected to believe that Ministers in London did not know what their Foreign Secretary had been doing in Washington. This raises the most crucial questions about communications between the Foreign Secretary and his Department and his relationship with the Prime Minister. The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office's answer persuades me to believe every statement that I have made, not least that about the relationship with the right hon. Member for Sidcup (Mr Heath). I give notice that tomorrow I shall be queuing up for another Adjournment debate.

4. Conduct of the Prime Minister

I make no apology for returning yet again to the subject of the sinking of the *Belgrano*. I am particularly glad that the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr Clark) has said that he wishes to take part in the debate, because for the past 13 months his contributions have been serious and heavyweight, albeit from a very different point of view.

In *The Times Literary Supplement* this morning, a two-page review of Falklands books ends with the words:

Max Hastings quotes a soldier saying of the Falklands, 'if they are worth dying for they have got to be worth keeping,' but only now do the implications of keeping them become clear.

Max Hastings sang a different tune in *The Standard* last month:

Nobody, least of all the Falkland Islanders themselves, believe that Britain can continue to defend them with a full task force in perpetuity.

So Hastings is one of many who is beginning to change his mind. The review ends:

Those who supported the war ask what the consequences for England and the world would have been if Mrs Thatcher's government had given in to illegality, had appeased the aggressors, questions which of their nature cannot be answered.

Those who opposed the war have their questions which will become more and more insistent with time. A brilliant and daring campaign whose record will always be stirring was fought to reconquer a bleak and barren spot in the ocean of which no use could be made unless it were a place of exile for the hypocrites of patriotism.

It would be good if the world were in some measure a better place for last year's war. That is an imponderable. What seems more likely is that the British people and Government may yet find themselves saying with Johnson 'May my country never be cursed with such another conquest'. I say that because, whether we like it or not, these questions will not go away.

If there are two sides to the argument summed up by *The Times Literary Supplement* today, I shall place the hon. Member for Sutton on the other side of this serious argument. However, it would be churlish of me—whatever the hon. Gentleman may have said last night—not to acknowledge that I have greatly inconvenienced the Minister and, no doubt, his officials. I hope that the inconvenience is not too great.

The Minister asked for longer to reply last night. In today's debate he has ample opportunity. If this debate needed any justification, it is that last night's debate at least elicited more new information. Indeed, every time a Minister says more, he raises more real—not trifling or pernickety—questions. For example, it was not known until last night—and I quote from last night's *Hansard*: 'The result of those conversations was telegraphed to London at 22.15 GMT'—I should point out that that is 23.15—11.15 British summer time—

over three hours after the attack on the *Belgrano*. It could not be telegraphed before, because it was not possible to get a clear and concise statement before that time of what was in the air.

That is a completely new fact. In a moment I shall address myself to the obvious questions about how on earth it was that, having sent the Foreign Secretary to Washington, the Government did not at least check with him before embarking on this cataclysmic act of sinking the *Belgrano*.

I do not in any way criticise *Hansard*, who took very accurately the speech that I made last night, but I want to put in context one change of sense. I asked, and repeat:

What we really must establish is the gap, in technical terms, between the sending of the message to *Conqueror* and its time of reception. At what time did the captain of *Conqueror* receive the order to sink the *Belgrano*?

Surely that question can be answered this morning. Surely, also, the next question that I asked can be answered this morning:

How continuously well informed were the authorisers of the sinking? What was the timing of the despatch of the authorisation to fire the torpedo in relation to any incoming news that agreement was being reached on the basis formulated by the Peruvian Government and that it was imminent?

The correction comes now:

If the Government did not know that agreement was imminent and sent instructions, I concede it is different from sending instructions with the knowledge that the agreement was imminent. The timing in this matter is important. I asked the Government when they heard that agreement was close and what was the timing in relation to the despatch of the authorisation to sink and whether that authorisation was given before or after it was known that the Peruvian agreement was so close. — [*Official Report*, 12 May 1983; Vol. 42, c. 1009-11.]

Those questions are repeated, and I hope that we shall have detailed answers.

I believe that there is one question above all others to which the House must now address itself. Before taking so drastic a step as sinking the *Belgrano*, which had a crew of more than 1,000 and where inevitably there would be loss of life in those waters, why was no check made with the Foreign Secretary in Washington and New York and why was no check made with the Government of the United States of America, because their

hemispheric relations would be affected by such an action?

It seems only elementary, given what this Government are asking the Americans to do about cruise, Pershing and Trident missiles – and it happens that I do not go along with it – given their view of the United States of America and the Prime Minister's own personal relationship with President Reagan and knowing their concern, at least to have asked the Americans. Not checking finally with the Foreign Secretary is mind-boggling, because the stated reason for the Foreign Secretary going to Washington was to get peace.

I do not believe that the Foreign Secretary regarded it as a cynical negotiation or a journey for the sake of pretence. In all our 20 years membership of the House, I do not believe that the right hon. Gentleman has ever gone in for that kind of cynical charade. But there is supporting evidence for what I say. On that Sunday, having arrived earlier in Washington, the right hon. Gentleman made it clear that there would be no bombs, no attack and no action. He said specifically on that Sunday that the attack the day before with cluster bombs on Port Stanley had been to bring the seriousness of our purpose to the attention of the Argentines and to concentrate the minds of the Argentine authorities.

In those circumstances and against that scenario, how can it possibly be convincing that it was done for military reasons if the Foreign Secretary in that negotiating position in America was not checked with?

I return to a point made in last night's debate by the Minister. He described me as speaking yet again every time

a journalist eggs him on. – [*Official Report*, 12 May 1983; Vol. 42, c. 1011.]

I must make one matter clear in a personal sense. In all this, I cannot remember taking the initiative in approaching any journalist. The truth is that a large number of journalists have approached me. Of course, when I am approached by a member of the Lobby of the House in the first

instance, yes, I keep up the relationship if that journalist is interested. But I do not think that there is any member of the Lobby of the House of Commons who can say that on this subject of the Falklands he did not ask me first. In fact there has been no contact with certain papers which do not care for my point of view.

I can give a long list of discriminating and serious journalists who have approached me, and it is fair to say that I have gone back to them having been approached in the first instance. But I did not approach George Carey of 'Panorama', Rodney Cowton of *The Times*, Paul Foot, Arthur Cavshon of AT, Andrew Graham-Youll of *The Guardian*, Ted Harrison of the BBC, Steve Hewlett of Channel Four, Norman Kirkham of *The Sunday Telegraph*, Gerard Morgan-Grenville, Chris Mullin of *Tribune*, Richard Norton-Taylor of *The Guardian*, John Pilger of *The Daily Mirror*, George Rosie of *The Sunday Times*, Germón Sopena from Argentina, John Wear, nor Andrew Wilson of *The Observer*. On each occasion, the initial approach was made by a serious journalist, and I do not think they can all be brushed aside. As I say, the parliamentary lobby is made up of discriminating people, and I do not think that it can really be said that I am likely to be egged on in this way. I suggest that that is not the way to put it.

Another matter ought to be made clear. Last night the impression was given that here was a weird eccentric man going on and on about this subject. Not all my colleagues were here last night and I must say that 155 Labour Members of Parliament signed early-day motion 480 asking for an inquiry into the circumstances of the sinking of the *General Belgrano* along the lines of that into the Jameson raid. I do not say that that is the most perfect comparison. I should not like to be pressed by the hon. Member for Down, South (Mr Powell) on the history of Joseph Chamberlain and the Jameson raid, but it is the nearest analogy. The inquiry into the Dardenelles has certain disadvantages, as do the inquiries into the Mesopotamia and the Crimean war, but I believe that there should be some kind of inquiry. Some of my most tough-minded parliamentary

colleagues have signed that early-day motion. They are Members who do not sign any old motion that is shoved in front of their noses.

It is also said that I am obsessed by the *Belgrano*. It is because in the sinking of the *Belgrano* that I believe the good name of Britain has been besmirched that I raise the matter. When history comes to be written the sinking of the *Belgrano* will be seen as a dreadful episode in our history. I believe that it was no accident that the early-day motion was entitled 'Conduct of the Prime Minister' because I believe that she has shown disgraceful personal conduct. If I am accused of being over-personal, I must draw attention to the astonishing fact given by Hastings and Jenkins that from 2 April until 5 May—33 days—the Prime Minister did not call a full meeting of her Cabinet on the Falklands. It was only after the attack on the *Sheffield* that she had to go to the Cabinet for endorsement. So I am afraid this is a very personalised situation. All that is in me—this is why I go on about it—is outraged by the fact that she should have got away with it for so long. From February 1982 she has behaved wickedly about the Falklands issue, and the *Belgrano* is but one-tenth of the iceberg of infamy.

I refer particularly to question 4 yesterday. The Prime Minister, in reply to my question, said:

The hon. Gentleman's allegations are utterly ridiculous. The *Belgrano* was sunk for military reasons and the threat was real.

I strongly dispute that statement. The Prime Minister continued:

News of the Peruvian proposals did not reach London until after the attack.

That begs many questions about the relationship with her Foreign Secretary. She continued:

The record shows that our efforts to reach a negotiated settlement continued until 17 May, 15

days after the sinking of the *Belgrano* on 2 May.—
[*Official Report*, 12 May 1983; Vol. 42, c. 922.]

That is technically true but, of course, once the *Belgrano* had been sunk it was an entirely different ball game because the whole war had moved from a basically non-fighting war into a completely different area. I believe that after the torpedo was launched, the chances of a negotiated settlement had been transformed.

The Prime Minister's second statement is astonishing and it must be examined because if it is true it implies that the Foreign Secretary should resign forthwith for dereliction of duty and that heads should roll in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for incompetence. As I have said, I have been a defender of the Foreign Office and I do not believe that it was incompetent. As I said yesterday, and have said many times previously, the Foreign Office officials are not incompetent, certainly not in this situation, where they did their duty.

The Prime Minister's third point shows what a limited person she is. The idea that negotiations could go on meaningfully reveals someone who does not understand much about South Americans and less about human nature among foreigners. I campaign because at home she appeals to the worst jingoistic elements of the English. I am entitled to say that in view of the amendment to the motion on the conduct of the Prime Minister. The bravery of the armed forces has never been in dispute, but anybody who reads the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mr Maxwell-Hyslop) will see exactly what I am getting at.*

In dealing with the military threat, I want to refer to the interview with Lord Lewin on 30 January. It is curious that in a reference on 2 May last year to the sinking of the *Belgrano*, the chief of staff said that the vessel was sailing towards the task force whereas the Ministry of Defence has admitted that it was sailing away from the task force and towards Argentina on a 280 degree course. Lord Lewin said that it was a threat to the task force whereas in reality it was an obsolete status symbol

*For the text of the Amendment, see page 77.

whose guns had a range of seven miles less than the Exocets fitted to the 15 ships of the task force. He said that Argentina had escalated the conflict the previous day with an air attack on task force ships whereas that attack, which injured one sailor, was in response to Vulcan and Sea Harrier attacks and a substantial naval gunnery bombardment of the Stanley airbase earlier in the day which killed 19 and injured 37 Argentines.

Lord Lewin claimed that the *General Belgrano* and its escorts represented one part of a co-ordinated attack on the task force which also involved Argentina's only aircraft carrier, whereas repeated parliamentary questions seeking information on this attack have been met with the response that it would not be in the public interest to disclose the extent of the Government's knowledge of Argentine naval activity.

In addition to Lord Lewin's response, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces stated:

Concerned that HMS *Conqueror* might lose the *General Belgrano* as she ran over the shallow water of the Burdwood Bank, the task force commander sought and obtained a change in the rules of engagement. — [Official Report, 29 November 1982, Vol. 33, c. 104.]

When it was sunk the *General Belgrano* was 45 miles outside of the Burdwood Bank, known depth 25 fathoms, and heading away from the bank towards its home port.

Is it true that the submarines were directly responsible to Northwood and were not at that time under the control of the task force commander? My understanding is that the submarines operated direct from Northwood. The sinking of the *General Belgrano* is seen as one of the pivotal events of the Falklands war. As we are faced with a tissue of contradiction from Government sources, should there not be a public inquiry? The evidence goes against the Prime Minister's assertion that the sinking of the *General Belgrano* took place for military reasons. Do the Government still maintain that HMS *Conqueror* first contacted the *General Belgrano* on

2 May? An inquiry should examine people such as Commander Wreford-Brown, Surgeon-Commander MacDonald and Petty Officers Billy Guinea and Billy Budding. As a result of talking to two members of the crew of HMS *Conqueror*, it became clear that the *General Belgrano* was detected not on 2 May but on 1 May. That information has not just arisen from my gossiping with the crew. It is in the *Sunday Times* book and in the book by Hastings and Jenkins. Furthermore, it is accepted in the corpus of knowledge. Do the Government still maintain that the *Belgrano* was detected on 2 May, because they are now saying that the *Belgrano* was detected some hours earlier. On 4 and 5 May, the then Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for St Ives (Mr Nott), made clear that the *Belgrano* had been initially detected at 8 o'clock London time on 2 May. The radio programme 'The World at One' recently broadcast that clip in Mr Ted Harrison's programme.

I have received a letter from a relative of a member of the crew of HMS *Conqueror* asking if I understood how exhausted those boys were when they returned and that they had, naturally, been extremely frightened and had a rough time. I understand all of that. I am not criticising the crew or our service men. I am criticising the political direction of the war. Was the authorisation to sink *Belgrano* given before or after it was known that peace was in the bag? My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea, South (Mr Dubs) has referred to telegrams that are printed in the *New Statesman*. The telegrams are important and I will refer to them.

Lima, May 2, Reuter—Peruvian President Fernando Belaunde Terry said today that peace negotiations between Argentina and Britain were under way and that both countries had agreed in principle to cease hostilities. He was speaking at a press conference here on the efforts to end the fighting between Britain and Argentina over the disputed Falkland Islands.

That telegram was sent at 00.30 hours. The next

telegram reads:

0045: Falklands—Belaunde 2 Lima. President Belaunde said that both parties would be willing to accept peace proposals set out by Secretary of State Alexander Haig who conducted a peace shuttle mission between London and Buenos Aires before fighting broke out.

The President said that he could not go into further details but added: negotiations are under way and that in a short while total peace can be established in the South Atlantic and there is a will on both sides to cease hostilities.

The next telegram reads:

0054: Falklands—Belaunde 3 Lima. As President Belaunde made his announcement Argentina's ruling military junta are meeting in Buenos Aires to discuss the Falklands crisis.

0109: Falklands—Belaunde 3A Lima: In London, a spokesman for the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's office said he knew nothing of the reported negotiations or agreement in principle.

As the Foreign Secretary was in America doing precisely that and was presumably in contact with ambassador Charles Wallace in Peru—a very able diplomat—it is mind-boggling and astonishing that such statements can be made. Again—

0123: Falklands—Belaunde: President Belaunde said Argentina and Britain were studying a seven-point peace plan drawn up by Mr Haig. He said that at present General Galtieri was discussing this with Argentine leaders, adding: 'If this effort fails it will be a tragedy for Latin America and perhaps for the world.'

Once more:

0158 . . . snap: London, May 3, Reuter . . . A British submarine torpedoed the Argentine cruiser *General Belgrano* in the South Atlantic last night, the British defence ministry said today. The cruiser was believed to have been severely damaged, the Ministry said.

Given what was going on, how could such an order have been given by people seriously interested in peace? If the spokesman was inaccurate or did not know, we should be told about that. The questions that I asked yesterday as reported in col. 109 of *Hansard* are important and fit into the argument. We need a point by point denial and not a blanket denial that we received last night. Did the Foreign Secretary have a working breakfast with Al Haig in Washington? Do the Government deny—I have cross-checked this again—the statement that Peter Snow made on 29 April? I reiterate that I am talking about journalists who are very careful. The 'Newsnight' transcript states:

At breakfast time in Washington Haig and Pym had a long meeting.

Did they or did they not have a long meeting? The transcript continues:

Our American source tells us that it was now clear to Haig that Mr Pym wanted a settlement—

I do not doubt that for a moment—

and was working hard for it—

I do not doubt that either.

We're told that Mr Haig personally phoned Mrs Thatcher.

Is that accurate or inaccurate?

So, according to the Peruvians and the Americans

Britain was aware—at the highest level—of all that had developed at the time they were getting up from lunch at Chequers.

Is that accurate or inaccurate? The transcript continues:

now what no-one is telling us is exactly when the war cabinet at Chequers made its decision to give the Navy the green light for the *Conqueror* to attack the *Belgrano*.

Perhaps we could have an answer to that. The transcript goes on:

whether or not the full reported details of President Galtieri's alleged acceptance of the plan were known to Mrs Thatcher when she finally said Yes to Commander Wreford Brown there should have been time to attempt to call the mission off in the intervening five hours.

If there was no contact, why did not the whole Foreign Office machine at least contact the Foreign Secretary to find out what he was up to in America? That is the astonishing thing. Yesterday I quoted the reaction of Sir Nicholas Henderson, who went white when he heard what had happened to the *Belgrano*. People are beginning to talk and we should establish why consultation did not take place with his own boss. Why did not consultations take place with the Foreign Secretary, Sir Anthony Parsons, Sir Nicholas Henderson and our ambassador in Lima over that crucial decision? By what means did the Peruvian proposals reach London, and was the ambassador in Lima negotiating with the Government of Peru with the approval of Her Majesty's Government before any information on those proposals reached London?

Had all the Foreign Secretary's activities gone on unbeknown to the Prime Minister? is that what we are expected to believe? As I have said, it is all very well saying, as the Minister did last night, that I am 'egged on' by journalists, but Mr Foot has been to the place

where the information comes from. That is why I must have a point-by-point reply. He says in his researched article:

The Belaunde proposals, it is safe to conclude, were taken seriously by both sides. They were drawn up into a treaty which was expected to be signed. And they were put to flight by the sinking of the *Belgrano*.

Is it said that there were no proposals?

Senor Arias Stella, who is a fellow of the Royal Society of Pathologists in London and has no anti-British feeling, generously ascribes the *Belgrano* sinking to military accident. He told me that he and all his colleagues had assumed that some hothead submarine commander had let fly at the cruiser without any idea of the state of negotiations in Lima, Buenos Aires and Washington.

This has been indignantly denied by the submarine commander himself. He insists he received clear orders to sink the cruiser—

and said so when he returned to Faslane on 5 July. Mr Foot continues:

Nor have Tory Ministers been slow to claim their part in the action. Margaret Thatcher told the House of Commons on 4 May last year: 'With regard to that particular event [the sinking of the *Belgrano*] and all events other than the mere tactical ones in the South Atlantic, the task force clearly is and was under political control.

What was the control? We have to be clear about this. When the order was given to the submarine commander to fire the torpedo, who was in control? Mr Foot continues:

A few minutes later, Nott, the Defence Secretary, was asked by Willie Hamilton: 'Will the Minister confirm

... that the decision to launch the torpedoes was a political decision—in other words, it was made either by the Prime Minister or by the Rt. Hon. gentleman, or by both together? Or was it made by an admiral on the spot?’ Nott replied, rather evasively: ‘The overall political control remains with the government.’

There the matter rested until last October, when a mysterious leak to the newspapers (printed in all of them) ‘revealed’ that the decision to sink the *Belgrano* had been taken by the ‘war cabinet’ (minus Pym) in pre-lunch discussions with the service chiefs on 2 May.

This version comes out in *The Battle for the Falklands* by Simon Jenkins and Max Hastings as follows: ‘Sir Terence Lewin went to the war cabinet meeting at Chequers on the morning of Sunday, 2 May to request permission under the rules of engagement to sink the *General Belgrano* some 40 miles South West of the total exclusion zone.’ After some discussion, the book goes on: ‘No Minister demurred. The order was issued before lunch.’ One difficulty about this is that the cruiser was not actually sunk until about eight hours afterwards between 3 and 4 pm Argentine time—8 and 9 pm GMT. Even given the difficulties of contact with a submerged submarine, this does seem a huge time gap.

I refer again to the interview given by Lewin on ‘The World at One’ on 30 January when he said distinctly that there were no difficulties at that time in contacting the submarine. He made that clear in that interview and it is on the record.

Foot states:

Another problem is that the war cabinet meeting with the defence chiefs was not just a discussion about the *Belgrano*. It was, as reported in the newspapers on 4 May, a full-scale assessment of the state of the war, which went on for four hours. At any rate, the direct responsibility of Thatcher, Whitelaw, Nott and Parkinson for the *Belgrano* sinking has never

been denied. The question then arises: how much did they know of the progress of the Peruvian peace talks?

That is the question which must be asked. What was known at Chequers about the progress of the talks?

Paul Foot states:

The seven-point plan had been agreed between Haig and Belaunde the previous night (in Britain, the early hours of the morning). Was it conveyed to Chequers that night? Did the War Cabinet meeting not have before it 'the latest from Francis in Washington'?—

Something must be explained about the contacts between the war cabinet and the Foreign Secretary.

Even if they did not, they knew that Pym had gone to Washington in a last bid for peace—

What on earth was the Foreign Secretary doing there if he was not taking part in major negotiations? That is the criminal part of not contacting him before pressing the trigger—

However hopeless such a mission seemed in the eyes of the hawks in the war cabinet (and by all accounts they were all hawks except Pym), they knew that the armed forces could not be seen to cut the ground from under the Foreign Secretary's feet.

I believe that the ground was cut from under the Foreign Secretary's feet—and how.

On arrival in Washington the previous evening, Mr Pym gave an impromptu press conference—

Foot states that the Foreign Secretary

explained that the attacks on the Falklands that day had been intended to concentrate the Argentines'

minds on a peaceful settlement.

Nicholas Ashford reported in *The Times* on 2 May that the right hon. Gentleman said:

No further military action is envisaged at the moment, except to keep the exclusion zone secure.

Foot says that

This pledge was kept—right up to the sinking of the *Belgrano*.

At the very least, then, the Cabinet that Sunday morning knew that Pym was trying for peace and that a period of calm was vital if he was seen to be trying. That is the background, apparently, in which they gave the order to attack a ship on the high seas, with a complement of 1,000 men, when it was outside the war zone that they themselves had designated.

I am not greatly impressed by what the Minister said last night about generalised warnings. Why establish a zone unless action will be taken only inside it?

Foot continued:

As the afternoon and evening went on, however, Mrs Thatcher and those Ministers who stayed in contact can have been left in no doubt as to the progress of the Peruvian peace talks. By noon US time, 5 pm GMT, after all, the seven-point plan had been agreed between Belaunde, Haig and Galtieri. Even before he sat down to lunch with Haig, Francis Pym must have known about this, and expressed his own agreement. He must, too, have conveyed it back to Chequers . . . If the order to sink had in fact been given at lunchtime, there was still time to countermand the order, or to try to countermand it. For the *Belgrano* was not sunk until three hours later.

I quote from page 9 of the transcript of 30 January.

Christopher Lee, the BBC correspondent, asked whether approval was immediately forthcoming. Lewin said:

Yes, immediately forthcoming and was taken with legal advice in terms of international law and we were within international law and the attack was justified under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter which permits you to take action in your own self-defence.

Lee asked:

From the time that the *Conqueror* sighted the *Belgrano* to the time that it sank the *Belgrano*, how long did it take?

Lewin answered:

A matter of hours. Communications with nuclear submarines are not continuous and 100 per cent., because this would restrict the nuclear submarine's operations. But on this occasion, the communications worked very quickly.

That was the view of the chief of staff, not mine.

The Government do not deny that they were prepared to accept the Belaunde proposals. Foot claims:

The official Foreign Office document, *The Falkland Islands: negotiations for a Peaceful Settlement*, published on 20 May last year, says: 'The next stage of the negotiations was on proposals originally advanced by President Belaunde of Peru and modified in consultations between him and the United States Secretary of State . . . Britain was willing to accept the final version of these proposals for an interim agreement, but Argentina rejected it.' The document does not point out that Argentina rejected it under the most savage provocation imaginable, namely, the sinking of the *Belgrano*.

If the interim agreement had come into force, what

would have happened? All forces would have been withdrawn: 1,000 lives and several thousand million pounds would have been saved; the British forces would have left the Falklands for the time being; and a settlement respecting the needs of the islanders would probably have been reached. Not everyone would have been satisfied, but at least the Falkland Islands would have had a future as a place where people live and work rather than as a military bunker.

The only organisation seriously undermined by a settlement would have been the British Conservative party. Its press and its Right wing would have been let off the leash. Only war and conquest would have satisfied them. For the Iron Lady, donning the ill-fitting garment of peace and compromise, the future would have been bleak indeed.

That is why the details must be examined in depth. I repeat that the action, like so many other actions throughout the Falklands campaign, was taken on the basis, not of military necessity, but of political necessity. The threat was not to the task force but to the Prime Minister's position.

Now we are left in an appalling position. Our country is trapped. Sooner or later we shall have to negotiate. Today we hear news that the Rev. David Shepherd, the Bishop of Liverpool, has come back to say that there are two sides to the case. The difficulty is that those who put forward views may go away, but the questions themselves will not go away. Time is not on our side, and sooner than we think we shall have to negotiate it. It is better to negotiate in the knowledge of the truth of what happened.

The *Belgrano* is just one of the tips of the iceberg. I wonder why on the evening of 7-8 April, five days before the submarine spy could have got there and, as the American Secretary of State was in mid-air on his way to see her about peace the British Prime Minister decided to impose a military exclusion zone. Anyone concerned about peace would not have acted in such a pre-emptive way. Indeed, if one refers to the Franks committee report, one realises that we must have had

military contingency plans. It is becoming clearer and clearer that orders were placed for explosives in the shipyards of the Tyne as far back as February. It is now clear that the Argentine junta decided to invade on 12 January. It is also clear that our MI6 performed properly. How could this country have gone on so long with that knowledge without saying to Argentina, 'If you invade we will react'? In life, it is quite acceptable to take a hard line and then compromise. To start with a soft position and then take hard action is utterly unacceptable.

The Government would be well advised to give a great deal more information as soon as possible. People are beginning to talk. I wonder what the memoirs that Al Haig is busy writing will reveal. I also wonder what the memoirs of the right hon. Member for Sidcup (Mr Heath) will reveal. They will be revealing because the right hon. Member for Sidcup had plenty to say during the first week in May about the Peruvian peace proposals and asked in what respect they were unacceptable. Indeed, he went on television to make that point at some length.

When the history of this affair is written, complexities about the internal domestic politics of the Conservative party will be revealed. It will reveal the Prime Minister's worries about her Foreign Secretary's old loyalty to the right hon. Member for Sidcup. That was right, as he was the right hon. Gentleman's Chief Whip. I believe that the right hon. Member for Sidcup and the then Foreign Secretary would have done the right thing. It is quite clear that no British Prime Minister since Churchill, and probably not Churchill, would have acted as has the present Prime Minister on many occasions throughout the crisis. That is why so much of what I have said about the Prime Minister's conduct is personalised.

*The Amendment proposed that the House noted 'that by taking the deliberate decision to send its armed forces through international waters to invade British territory, fire upon British servicemen and expel the Governor of the Falkland Islands, the Argentine Government deliberately commenced hostilities against Great Britain; and therefore judges that these facts in themselves deny the need for any explanation for or inquiry into the sinking by British forces of any Argentine warship anywhere in the ensuing hostilities; and further notes the singular lack of appreciation shown by the hon. Member for West Lothian for the victory gained for Great Britain by the skill and bravery of the armed forces of the Crown, fully supported in their fight by a resolute Government and people.'

Afterword

Since this book was sent to press, several further damaging pieces of evidence have come to light. In paragraph 10 of the Government White Paper, *The Falklands Campaign: the Lessons*, Sir John Nott states that 'On May 2, HMS *Conqueror* detected the Argentine cruiser, *General Belgrano*'. Yet in *Our Falklands War*, published a few days ago, Geoffrey Underwood writes:

'We were asked to look for and find the *General Belgrano* group,' said Commander Wreford Brown. 'It was reported to consist of the cruiser and escort. We located her on our passive sonar and sighted her visually early on the afternoon of 1 May.

'We took up a position astern and followed the *General Belgrano* for over 30 hours. We reported that we were in contact with her. We remained several miles astern and deep below her. We had instructions to attack if she went inside the total exclusion zone.'

Commander Wreford Brown said that on 2 May he received a signal from the commander-in-chief, Fleet Headquarters at Northwood which made a change in the rules of engagement and allowed him to attack the Argentinian cruiser outside the total exclusion zone.

'I fired a salvo of 3 mark 8 torpedoes from about 1,400 yards. They were fired at short intervals. I was at periscope depth during the visual attack.'

Even more disturbingly it now emerges that, as I have always suspected, the British Government were definitely aware that the *General Belgrano* was making for home, *not* approaching the task force, when they gave the order to sink her. For at 8.07 pm South Atlantic time (11.07 am GMT) on Saturday, 1 May, the first order was given by the Operational Commander of the *25 de Mayo* for the *Belgrano* and her escorts to return to port. This was confirmed by the Supreme Command

at 1.19 am South Atlantic time (4.19 am GMT). Both messages would have been intercepted by British Intelligence, so that by the time the Prime Minister was sitting down to breakfast at Chequers on Sunday, 2 May, we can safely assume that she knew precisely what the position was.

Another piece of tangential, but no less convincing, evidence of Mrs Thatcher's guilt lies in her reaction to any reference to the *Belgrano*. Her response to my questions in the House have been damning enough, but her response to the public is even more suspicious. When asked by a Bristol housewife, who phoned in to 'Nationwide' on Tuesday, 24 May, why the Tory War Cabinet had ordered the sinking of the *Belgrano*, the Prime Minister became extremely flustered and lost her usual iron control. If she were innocent of the charges I have brought against her, she would surely not have reacted in his fashion.

These facts are disturbing enough in themselves, but their real interest perhaps lies in what they suggest for the future. If they have come to light more than a year after the event, how much more is there for us to learn? I have absolutely no doubt that other evidence will emerge to fill in the final pieces of this sinister jigsaw puzzle.

In 21 years as a Member of the House of Commons, I have scrupulously eschewed personalised politics. Never have I indulged in name-calling, in or out of the House. Therefore the charge made against me by a Government Minister that I am pursuing a personal vendetta against Mrs Thatcher is entirely novel. It demands to be rebutted.

The contemporary issue in Britain in the early 1980s is Thatcher. Love her or hate her, *she* is the issue. Not just at the hustings, win or lose, in June 1983. It is deeper than that. Her style of government and political attitude is imprinted as an option for the British people.

Therefore, examination of her personal conduct at moments of supreme crisis is a matter of public importance, far exceeding the normal foibles of politicians. How such characters are likely to react at critical moments in an age of advanced nuclear weapons

is a matter of paramount consequence. In a curious way, American public opinion perceived this truth and excluded Senator Edward Kennedy from running for the White House, encapsulating in its consciousness the memory of Chappaquidick.

Both in its origins and in its conduct, the Falklands crisis was a highly personalised war. For 33 days, between 2 April and 5 May, when she needed wise counsel, she called no meeting of her full Cabinet to discuss the Falklands. Thus Mrs Thatcher and her admirers cannot reasonably complain if her own conduct is put under the microscope.

Had the Falklands all been simply a matter of past history, the behaviour of the Prime Minister in crisis would be ample justification for this book.

But, alas, unless there is a change of attitude in relation to the whole question of negotiating seriously with Argentina, sooner or later, in one form or another, fighting will break out again. The prospect of the cost of countering continuous Argentine low-intensity operations is daunting enough. Worse than the loss of Britain's money—reckoned at approximately £1½m. per day—is the spectre of more young blood being spilled.

If this book does anything to help prevent a Second Falklands or Second Malvinas War, it will have served its purpose.

Tam Dalyell

asked why I went on about the *Belgrano*, since Franks had exonerated the Government. If the IRN commentators do not realise that Franks did not cover the *Belgrano*, how many others who are not commentators are in the same position?' Mr Dalyell's conclusion cannot be ignored by any thinking person: 'If there had been no *Belgrano*, there would probably have been no *Sheffield*, no *Atlantic Conveyor*, no *Ardent*, no *Antelope* and no *Coventry*.'

The book contains a valuable introduction by the defence analyst, Paul Rogers. Dr Rogers was called in March 1983 to give evidence on future Argentine military postures in relation to the Falklands to the House of Commons Select Committee on Defence.

The Author: Tam Dalyell (b. 1932) is a weekly columnist on *New Scientist* and the author of a number of books, including the controversial *One Man's Falklands*. He has been Labour MP for West Lothian since 1962. He was Opposition Spokesman on Science from 1980 until sacked by Michael Foot on the Falklands' issue in 1982; Parliamentary Private Secretary to Richard Crossman, 1964-70; Chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party Foreign Affairs Group, 1974-76. Was called to give evidence before the Franks Enquiry into the Falklands in October 1982.

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