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WE ARE ALL FALKLANDERS NOW

The aim of all strategy is to fulfil clearly-stated political objectives making the best use of the resources available. At the heart of strategy is the art of applying force so that it makes the most effective contribution towards the achievement of the political objective. In relationships between states, strategic interests often collide. When they do so force need not be, but may ultimately become the only way to resolve the issue of opposing wills.

It is important to have these strategic principles in mind when we come to focus on the Falkland Islands affair after a weekend when emotions have quite naturally been at their height in reaction to the aggression of last Friday. Emotion is no sound basis for successful strategic thinking. If we are to prevail with our political objectives we must have both the wisdom to identify them, a variety of means to achieve them, and the will to choose the right means and to live with the consequences. At all times it is the future which must be borne in mind whatever mistakes are apparent from the past.

There can be — there must be — no doubt about our strategic objective. As the Prime Minister said in the Commons on Saturday, the Falkland Islands are British territory, inhabited by British citizens. They have been invaded by enemy forces. Those forces must be removed. The authority of Britain must be reasserted over the Islands. How we do that, and when, are tactical questions which will be considered in due course. But there can be no evading the principle at stake, and no doubt that the consequences of adhering to that principle may be hard, long, painful and unpredictable, with many people — friends and foes — getting hurt in the process.

The main objective

The objective therefore is the restoration of British sovereignty over the Falklands and the freedom for the Falklanders to choose what to do with their lives. It will not be easy. However, in 1939 we stood by Poland and went to war. Nobody could say that the Poles did not suffer the consequences, nor that we achieved anything for that unhappy people in the process. However, a moment had come in Europe when the consequence of *not* standing up to the aggressive policies of a dictatorship would have been worse than standing up to them. We are now in the same position with the Argentine dictatorship, only there is one substantial difference. We defended Poland because we had given our word and because the spread of dictatorship across Europe had to be stopped for our own sakes, not because we felt the need to topple Hitler from power within Germany. That could have been left as a matter for the German people, just as the tyranny of the Galtieri Junta is a matter for the Argentine people. As in 1939, so today; the same principles apply to the Falklands. We have given our word, and we must, where we can, prevent the expansionist policies of a dictatorship affecting our interests. But there is a more important dimension now. The Poles were Poles; the Falklanders are our people. They are British citizens. The Falkland Islands are British territory. When British territory is invaded, it is not just an invasion of our land, but of our whole spirit. We are all Falklanders now.

It should be made clear, however, that we have no quarrel with the good people of Argentina. There must be no nonsense of burning effigies, irrelevant spite, or public hysteria. The public imagination can so quickly and so easily be gripped by propaganda which can only distort and aggravate the issue. It is the misfortune of the Argentines to live under a Fascist dictatorship as they have done many times in their turbulent, truculent, unstable

150-year history. The people of Argentina are again today on their knees under the rifle butts of a military tyranny which has introduced a sinister new idiom to their language — “the disappeared ones”. The disappearance of individuals is the Junta's recognised method of dealing with opposition. We are faced now with a situation where it intends to make a whole island people — the Falklanders — disappear.

It is more particularly important to make a distinction between the Junta and the people of Argentina in view of the scenes of celebration there which greeted news of the invasion. There has been dancing in the streets. Poor Argentina, it has little enough to dance about today. But the general assumption that the invasion is a popular cause is correct. It is the only popular cause the Junta can find to pursue, and is no doubt thrilled to use it as a mask for the imposition of further injustices on its people. The Argentines have hardly ever stopped squabbling about boundaries in their short history. Recently they nearly went to war with Chile over a demarcation line — as though the Generals in each country did not have enough on their plates usurping democracy without having to usurp each other.

There is no basis in law for Argentina's claim to the Falklands. The first government in Buenos Aires which Britain recognized in 1825 itself recognized this fact as early as 1830. That the claim has recurred has been a reflection of the Argentine government's inability to satisfy its people without creating fantasies and distractions for them. To suggest that the Falklands is a relic of British colonialism might have been valid had there been an indigenous pre-colonial population on the Islands. There was not. If Argentina was allowed to get away with its seizure now it would truly be a case of neo-colonialism.

There is no basis in law but there is a powerful and popular emotional appeal manipulated by unscrupulous governments with no respect for any of their own laws. We have to recognize that, albeit illegally, the Junta has shown that it has not only the will to seize the Islands but the power to do so, and that as its domestic grip on the country has become more discredited it has yielded to an even greater temptation to provide its people with this popular distraction. It is in this area that there must have been misjudgments in the Foreign Office. There were signs that the Junta might be forced into a position to take ever more desperate action. They seem to have been ignored. Our response, both diplomatic and military, was correspondingly inadequate. It is in that area that we have fallen down, not in the fact that we had not provided day to day defence of the Falklands.

The power to retaliate

The only basis on which Britain could have defended the Islands — and has defended them hitherto — has been one of deterrence. Deterrence is a state of mind rather than a state of affairs on the ground or at sea. In this case the deterrence has broken down. The Argentines moved not because we had suddenly withdrawn our defences from the Falklands — there never were any — but because something convinced them that we no longer had the will or perhaps even the capacity to retaliate against an attack. And the whole foundation of a policy of deterrence not just in the Falkland Islands but in Berlin, on the Elbe, in the North Sea, or in the North Atlantic, is based on us having the means to retaliate against an attack, and the will to do so. Without those means and without that willpower the policy of deterrence is no longer credible. The deterrent will not deter. The bluff will be called. It was called last Friday.

There are many practical consequences which ensue

from the assertion of the governing principle that the aggression must be reversed. Somehow, sometime, the Argentine forces must be induced or forced to leave the Falklands. We have the full authority of a Security Council resolution to support that proposition. We could not ask for more than that. We probably expected less; and in the weeks ahead we will doubtless get less when it is shown that the influence of collective diplomacy is inadequate to dissuade a desperate group of men from perpetuating a colossal mistake, which they perhaps would rather die than admit. Diplomacy must be given a chance and it is always important in strategy to leave your adversary room to retreat, if retreat rather than annihilation is what you seek. It is a retreat that we seek.

The fleet's task

That is why although Britain has been the victim of an unprovoked attack, there is no reason yet to declare war on Argentina. That time may have to come, but we are operating at present under Article 51 of the UN Charter, which entitles us to take any action in the course of self defence. A declaration of war would impose constraints which do not now inhibit our freedom of action. For instance Argentine citizens here would have to be interned, as would the 17,000 British citizens in Argentina.

However while the fleet sails to the South Atlantic it is important to mobilize all moral and material support in the councils of the world. Much of it will fade away if and when the shooting starts. But we must be seen to have exhausted all the diplomatic options and to have established that our friends, though well intentioned, may be unable to provide any real help, or effective influence, when it comes to the point. At the end of this process we must therefore be prepared to go forward by ourselves. The decision to persist — as persist we must — will have to be ours and ours alone. It will be resisted; it will be argued against; it will be doubted. Persist we must.

If diplomatic efforts fail, in a few weeks time the Task Force will be in the right area. How it goes about securing the eviction or evacuation of the invading forces will be the subject of urgent technical study. It can be done; it will be done. In September 1939 we did not know how to get the Germans out of Poland; we knew it had to be done. That is the objective in the Falkland Islands; and it is a limited one. We neither want nor need to engage the Argentine forces in their home territory. But there may have to be a fight about it, in which people will get hurt. It would be surprising if the Argentine leaders did not seek to use the Falklanders as hostages, sheltering behind them like any cheap gangster grabbing the nearest body to shield him when caught in the act of robbery.

In this danger the Royal Navy must know it has the fullest support of the British people. On Saturday that support came out of the Commons loud and clear. Let us hope it will also be long. The time may come when the unilateralist Left will look back on its Churchillian posture on Saturday with amazement and regret. For the present it is enough to welcome the prodigal's return. Mr Nott made an ill judged speech scoring party points when he should have risen to a bigger occasion. One must therefore question his capacity to inspire confidence in that particular post at this particular time. Perhaps he should be transferred to another position in the Cabinet.

However, this raises the whole question of the standing of the Government as it faces the most crucial test for a British Government since Suez 25 years ago. There will be a time for inquests. There must be; since there have

been misjudgments, shortcomings of intelligence, mismanagement of resources. Though Mr Nott's standing, both in his Party and elsewhere in the Commons, is gravely dented, Lord Carrington's standing as Foreign Secretary is now also questioned.

Abroad he is well-known and much respected. His task in the important diplomatic manoeuvrings which lie ahead is considerable. However if he felt that some mistakes had been made for which he as Foreign Secretary held responsibility he would certainly accept that responsibility and honourably resign. It may be that the Government's capacity to retain the domestic unity expressed by Saturday's debate requires some such act of expiation. Without it there will be a constant temptation to indulge in inquests on the one hand and on the other to excuse the inadvertent policies of the recent past. This will only distract the Government and the country from the urgent need to create unity for the task ahead. There is no policy disagreement now, but the question of confidence in the Government's competence, rather than in its cohesion, may be the paramount one which should influence the Prime Minister's ministerial dispositions.

However the temptation to score Party points was not confined to the Treasury bench. In an otherwise laudable speech Mr Foot accused the Government of betraying the Falklanders. He is wrong. It is not merely the responsibility of this Government but of all Governments in the recent past who have had an ambivalence to the future of the Falklands which has shown itself in a readiness to negotiate British sovereignty while pretending that it is non-negotiable. This readiness to discuss such sensitive matters with a dictatorship doubtless tempted the Junta into thinking that our hearts did not lie very strongly with the Falklanders. It is late to prove them wrong but not too late. The paramount reason why it must not be too late to re-establish the evidence of British willpower is because the whole structure of this country's standing in the world, her credibility as an ally, as a guarantor of guarantees, as a protector of her citizens, depends on that willpower existing and being seen to exist.

The people's will

This is not just the responsibility of Government. It is the responsibility of the entire British people. They cannot will the ends of deterrence — peace — without willing the means — vigilance and involvement. War is too important a business to be left to the generals or to the politicians. It affects us all. The abolition of conscription enabled Governments to pretend to the people that the defence of the country and its strategic interests could be comfortably and conveniently left to the professionals while the rest of us paid our taxes and felt no further involvement. That can not be so. The national will to defend itself has to be cherished and replenished if it is to mean something real in a dangerous and unpredictable world. Mr Enoch Powell told the Commons that the next few weeks would see whether the “Iron Lady” was truly of that metal. It is not just a time to test her resolve but that of all the British people.

We are an island race, and the focus of attack is one of our islands, inhabited by our islanders. At this point of decision the words of John Donne could not be more appropriate for every Briton, for every islander, for every man and woman anywhere in a world menaced by the forces of tyranny:

“No man is an island, entire of itself. Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.”

It tolls for us; it tolls for them.