

WEEKEND WORLD - SUNDAY, 9TH MAY 1982

INVADING THE FALKLANDS.
MOMENT OF DECISION

STUDIO INTERVIEW WITH MR. JOHN NOTT MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE.

THIS TRANSCRIPT IS THE COPYRIGHT OF
LONDON WEEKEND TELEVISION WHO MUST
BE CREDITED IF USED.

BRIAN WALDEN

Hello and good morning. All the indications are that a British invasion of the Falkland Islands may well be imminent. Indeed there've been reports this morning from Argentina that it may already have begun. Our Ministry of Defence has denied the reports, but clearly the Falklands crisis is coming to a head. At the United Nations in New York today last-ditch diplomatic efforts are still continuing to try to find a peaceful solution to the dispute between Britain and Argentina. Few people however, now believe that these efforts will succeed, and if they fail and if the British government still wants to get the Argentinians off the Falklands, then it would appear to have little choice but to order that the islands be re-captured by force. In those circumstances, all-out bloody conflict seems inevitable. So will the government launch a re-invasion of the islands? Well, to help answer this question this morning, we'll be assessing whether the Argentinian government will back down, with the first full British television interview with the Argentinian Minister of Defence, Senor Amadeo Frugoli. We'll also be reporting on the findings of a Weekend World survey of British public opinion which bears a powerful message for our own government. And most important, John Nott, Britain's Secretary of State for Defence, who's with us in the studio, will be answering our questions. First though, let's hear the latest news headlines from ITN and Sandy Gall (ITN NEWS)

If there is all-out conflict in the South Atlantic, it won't be because Britain has been inflexible. Of course, the British government still wants the Argentinians off the Falklands. But since the Falklands peace drive started nearly five weeks ago, the position of Mrs. Thatcher and her Ministers on what should happen after a withdrawal has undergone a major shift. Once the government insisted on the return of the Falklands to British administration. Now it's agreed that they should be administered by a small group of unidentified countries whilst negotiations

BRIAN WALDEN CONTD.....

to settle the islands' long-term status continue. Once, the government demanded that in any settlement the views of the Falklands Islanders should be paramount. Now it no longer talks in such terms. But on one principle it has so far stood firm. The sovereignty of the Falkland Islands can only be changed by negotiation, with the Falkland Islanders still having a say. The question of sovereignty, the government has insisted, can't be pre-judged.

PATRICK KEATLEY - DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT "THE GUARDIAN"

British Ministers simply cannot accept recognition of Argentine sovereignty over the islands as a precondition for negotiations. They just won't have it. They want the Islanders themselves, 1800 people, to have a say in their own future, to vote on whatever formula emerges, and as Mr. Pym has said, that would make nonsense of negotiations if you in advance hand sovereignty to Argentina or admit that they have it. It's something that's to be negotiated about.

BRIAN WALDEN

But for all Britain's insistence on this point, the Argentinian government has always taken a very different view. The military junta under President Leopoldo Galtieri has asserted right from the start of the crisis that the sovereignty of the Falklands, which it claims is Argentinian, is non-negotiable. It's always held this view with great firmness.

JOHN CARLIN - REPORTER "BUENOS AIRES HERALD"

During the whole of the Haig mediation and right up until this moment Argentine Foreign Minister Costa Mendez has insisted again and again that everything is negotiable except sovereignty. In this he is articulating absolutely

JOHN CARLIN CONTD...

the view of the Argentine military leadership. They would be quite willing to withdraw troops from the Falkland Islands. They would be quite willing to offer Britain exploiting rights to the great mineral wealth there is in and around the Falkland Islands. They would be prepared to give the Falkland Islanders themselves red carpet treatment, but they will not back down on their demand of sovereignty.

BRIAN WALDEN

Only if Argentinian sovereignty is guaranteed, the military regime has said, will they be willing to withdraw their troops. It's this position which the British government's been trying to get Argentina to change since the start of the crisis. Hitherto, in attempting to do this the government's always stood firm by its policy of giving priority to diplomacy, employing the threat of the use of force only as a lever to help back its diplomatic efforts. It was in pursuit of this policy that the task force was despatched, and was ordered to establish a blockade round the Falklands. And it seems to have been to further the aims of the policy that the blockade zone round the Falklands was extended on Friday. Previously the zone covered an area within 200 miles of the Falkland Islands, but on Friday it was extended to within 12 miles of the Argentinian coast. The government didn't say that any Argentinian warships or military aircraft found within this zone would be attacked, but it implied they would. Faced with this threat it might have been hoped that the Argentinians would show some signs of compromise in any diplomatic activity which followed. It's the United Nations in New York which is now the only channel left for such diplomatic negotiations. The United Nations Secretary-General Senor Javier Perez de Cuellar is the man at the centre of these negotiations. He's put forward a six-point peace plan. This calls for an immediate ceasefire as the first step. Then it proposes the withdrawal of

BRIAN WALDEN CONTD...

Argentinian troops from the islands. At the same time the British naval task force would pull back. That would be followed by the start of direct negotiations between the two governments on the long-term future of the islands. The economic sanctions now being implemented against Argentina by Britain and a number of our allies would then be ended. And meanwhile, for an interim period the United Nations would administer the islands, possibly under a form of trusteeship. Clearly, this is a very skeletal package which might accommodate a multitude of different viewpoints. In the talks about the plan, no particular difficulties appear to have cropped up so far. But as soon as more detailed discussions take place, an obvious problem could arise. The Argentinian government may well continue to insist that sovereignty is non-negotiable, despite the threat implied by the extension of Britain's blockade on Friday. Of course, the British government might then back its diplomacy with more threats. It might threaten to invade the islands, or bomb the Argentinian mainland. Indeed a number of reports in today's British newspapers hint that such threats might have already been issued. Of course, the Argentinians might compromise in the face of such threats, but if they were to remain inflexible it's hard to see how a diplomatic solution could be arrived at. The British government's present position simply wouldn't allow it to accept the Argentinian demands without a major climbdown. Well, Weekend World has tried to find out just what the Argentinian reaction is likely to be. Yesterday, in Buenos Aires, Weekend World researcher Cresta Norris conducted the first full interview for British television with the Argentinian Defence Minister, Senor Amadeo Frugoli. She asked him first about the Argentinian government's current willingness to accept a ceasefire and the withdrawal of its troops from the islands, which the Argentinians call the Malvinas.

CRESTA NORRIS

How does the Argentine government react to a ceasefire proposal?

AMADEO FRUGOLI - ARGENTINIAN DEFENCE MINISTER (Translation)

The Argentine government responded affirmatively to the U.N. Secretary-General's proposal to initiate friendly discussions in order to try to find a peaceful solution to the dispute existing with Great Britain. It was pointed out that for these negotiations to take place there would have to be a ceasefire.

CRESTA NORRIS

Would you withdraw your troops immediately a ceasefire was announced?

AMADEO FRUGOLI

The ceasefire means specifically that no military operation should be carried out, but it does not imply a withdrawal of the troops.

CRESTA NORRIS

The British have always insisted during negotiations that the Islanders should be able to choose for themselves which country has sovereignty over them. How do you react to that?

AMADEO FRUGOLI

Argentina has never accepted the argument of self-determination for the inhabitants of the Malvinas Islands because that argument has no justification, since what is involved is a population which was transported there by a colonial power, in this case Great Britain, which took over the Malvinas Islands by force in 1833.

CRESTA NORRIS

How much consultation would you allow the islanders?

AMADEO FRUGOLI

I repeat that the argument of self-determination does not apply in the case of the Malvinas because it is not a population which has always been settled there. It was, I repeat, taken there by the colonial power - Great Britain - when they took the Malvinas by force in 1833.

CRESTA NORRIS

Turning now to the United Nations peace proposal, the main stumbling block from the British government's point of view seems to be the insistence so far of the Argentine government that Argentine sovereignty over the islands be guaranteed before any negotiations. Is there any chance under the circumstances that the Argentine government might change its position on this?

AMADEO FRUGOLI

It is quite clear that the acknowledgement of the unquestionable rights to sovereignty of the government and the people of Argentina to the Malvinas Islands can in no way be disregarded by Great Britain. This is an essential point which marks a limit in the negotiations.

CRESTA NORRIS

Would you accept the United Nations plan if it left the question of sovereignty of the islands to be decided when the trusteeship was concluded?

AMADEO FRUGOLI

This depends on the circumstances. What I want to make

AMADEO FRUGOLI CONTD.

never relinquish its rights of sovereignty to the Malvinas Islands. That during the diplomatic negotiations we can establish a particular sequence to deal with the problems is a different matter, which will depend on how the diplomatic talks develop. But the principle of the recognition of sovereignty over the Malvinas Islands is unchangeable. But this does not mean that we do not take into account the interests of the Malvinas inhabitants, and we are prepared to acknowledge their rights to own property, to compensation or other arrangements of an economic nature which may result from the possession of the islands by the Argentine government. Moreover, the Argentine government has stressed on numerous occasions that it does not intend to adopt any measures which would involve an abrupt change in the life-style of the Islanders. And those who wish to leave the islands because they do not feel happy have every opportunity to do so, and this has applied from the very beginning.

CRESTA NORRIS

Has the sinking of the General Belgrano and the loss of lives made the government more or less flexible ?

AMADEO FRUGOLI

The sinking of the cruiser General Belgrano by the British submarine Conqueror outside the exclusion zone established by the government of Great Britain has meant the loss of human lives. This painful event has only strengthened the spirit of the Argentine people, who are now more determined than ever to defend their legitimate rights

CRESTA NORRIS

And any military action taken by Britain will not make the government here more prepared to discuss the issue?

AMADEO FRUGOLI

I repeat that the Republic of Argentina will never under any circumstances relinquish its legitimate rights of sovereignty over the Malvinas Islands.

CRESTA NORRIS:

If the British continue with an air and naval blockade around the islands, would you breach it?

AMADEO FRUGOLI:

The Argentine government did not heed the blockade originally established in the 200 mile area around the Malvinas. The British government has now extended the blockade up to 12 miles from the coast of the Argentine mainland. This act undoubtedly constitutes a further aggression and a positive threat to intensify and extend the scope of military operations, and this happens at a time when Britain claims to be fully prepared to start diplomatic negotiations. Really it is impossible to understand how on the one hand they can state their desire to seek a diplomatic settlement, while on the other hand they extend the exclusion zone to the limits which I have just stated.

CRESTA NORRIS:

If the British were to bomb people and places on the Argentine mainland how would the Argentine government and people react?

AMADEO FRUGOLI:

The reaction will be to respond to the attack with all our operational capabilities.

CRESTA NORRIS:

What would be your response to an invasion of the islands by Britain?

AMADEO FRUGOLI:

My response is the response which will undoubtedly be given by the Argentine forces deployed on the Malvinas Islands who will use their full operational capabilities to defend our legitimate rights.

CRESTA NORRIS:

So do you think that the fighting will get more intense or that a settlement will be reached?

AMADEO FRUGOLI:

Argentina has from the very outset been ready to seek a peaceful settlement to this dispute, and in this she only continues a long and honourable tradition of respect for international relations and peaceful solutions of disputes between countries. But she certainly cannot accept willy-nilly, without defending herself from the aggression to which Great Britain has subjected her for so many years. The government of Great Britain has not shown willingness to negotiate and find a solution to the problem. For a hundred and forty-nine years she has maintained an illegitimate hold over the islands despite the repeated and permanent claims which have been made since then by all Argentine governments, and for the past seventeen years we have negotiated within the framework of the U.N. based on resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, but no specific results have been obtained.

BRIAN WALDEN:

The Argentinian government then, still seems most unwilling to compromise. One might take some of what the Defence Minister had to say with a pinch of salt. Bluff and bluster might have had a lot to do with it. But one thing Senor Frugoli made crystal clear. Argentina is still not prepared to put aside its claim to the sovereignty of the Falklands. In these circumstances it's hard to see diplomacy at the United Nations, or indeed anywhere else, delivering what the British government's seeking. So what will Mrs. Thatcher and her Ministers decide to do now? We'll be back in a moment.

BRIAN WALDEN:

Hello again. If diplomacy fails Mrs. Thatcher and her Ministers could be left with very few choices. They could hope to rely on the economic sanctions implemented by our major allies in Western Europe and America. The Argentinian economy is already very weak and it might be hoped that sanctions could bring it to its knees. But sanctions are notoriously slow-acting. And most experts agree that there's little chance of them having a decisive effect in Argentina for months. Alternatively, the government could order the task force to sit out a prolonged blockade. It might be hoped that such seige tactics would eventually drive the Argentinian forces on the Falklands to surrender. But such a strategy would bear great risks. Simply enforcing the enlarged blockade zone for long would face the task force with considerable problems. The weather will worsen as the southern winter approaches. The risk of accidents will increase. The fitness and morale of the men aboard our ships might begin to deteriorate. They could well continue to be vulnerable to air strikes like the one which destroyed H.M.S. Sheffield. The task force might so lose its potency that it might cease to be a threat. Britain might never get the islands back. Faced with that possibility, Mrs. Thatcher and her Ministers would have only one course to take if they wished to avoid a climb-down. They'd have to give priority to the use of military force to re-take the islands. Diplomacy would have to take a back seat. But storming the islands to recapture them would be no easy task. Military commanders have traditionally calculated that for an invasion of that sort to succeed the invading forces should outnumber defenders by three or four to one. Travelling with the task force, or earmarked for it, are estimated to be at least 5,000 British troops. But some of them haven't even left Britain yet. On the Falklands, by contrast, there are believed to be at least 5,000 and perhaps as many as 9,000 Argentinian defenders. Most of these are conscripts, and they might be little match for Britain's marines and paratroopers. Even so, Britain's troops would be vulnerable to air attack.

Brig. KENNETH HUNT:
Writer on Military Affairs

I think we have to accept that once we get troops on shore and they're established we're liable to be attacked from the air. Their position will be known, the attack will be rather easier for example than attacking the fleet where it's difficult to find the ship. The aircraft can come in low, they come in from the west. We clearly would have to take surface to air missile defences on board with us. Now in addition any re-supply is also itself vulnerable. Ships, for example, however small, could be attacked and so could any transport aircraft which were coming in either to drop or to land if the airstrip is made available again. Yes, I'm afraid we would be vulnerable. Now, there would be some air cover, but it might not be complete and permanent.

BRIAN WALDEN:

Only British superiority in the air above the islands could balance the odds. But gaining air superiority would be a very difficult matter. Additional Harrier fighters are currently being rushed to the task force, giving the task force commander, according to publicly available information, perhaps 40 in total. But the Argentinian air force has more than a hundred fighter aircraft. Some, like this Mirage Three, are relatively up-to-date. Others are less so. But even if allowance is made for the age of some of the Argentinian 'planes and also the Argentinian pilots' relative lack of skill and experience, they could defeat our warplanes in the air by sheer weight of numbers. So the only certain way to guarantee air superiority for Britain during landing would be to prevent the Argentinian fighters from ever taking off. Their bases on the Argentinian mainland would have to be bombed.

Brig. KENNETH HUNT:

There are certainly military arguments for bombing the Argentinian air bases, though obviously it would be a very big political step and taken with some reluctance. The argument would be that if you were suffering casualties from

aircraft which were coming away from unmolested bases and you weren't able to stop those casualties, then you would have to go to the bases from which the aircraft came. There would be a very strong case for that.

BRIAN WALDEN:

But such a strategy would be fraught with risk. There are only six airfields capable of handling jet fighters in Argentina. The main ones are at Puerto Belgrano, Comodoro Rivadavia, Rio Gallegos and Ushuaia. The Royal Air Force does have the means of putting them out of action. Ten Vulcan bombers, which normally carry nuclear weapons, are reported to have been converted so that each can deliver up to twenty-one thousand-pound high explosive bombs. These are capable of cratering runways and rendering them unusable. Nonetheless, the Argentinians might quickly fill in the holes. To keep the runways closed whilst an assault force established itself on the Falklands might require the Vulcans to return repeatedly. Such raids might though ensure that an invasion of the islands took place with minimal risk of air attack. Doubtless there'd be some bloodshed. But the invasion might succeed. The costs, however, could be great. Some Vulcans might be shot down with loss of British lives. As well as that, there'd always be the danger that some of the bombs might miss their targets and kill civilians.

MICHAEL GETHING:
Editor - 'Defence'

In executing a bombing raid on mainland Argentinian air-bases we have to assume that there is a possibility that the intruding aircraft will be engaged by either ground-based missiles or interceptor aircraft. Now while the low-level raids are usually quite accurate, if the aircraft bombing had to make any self-preservation moves early or late in the bombing run, then there is a possibility that some of the first or the last bombs of the stick might not go exactly where they were supposed to go, and depended on the nearness of civilian locations to the air base these could go astray.

BREAN WALLEN

The use of military force to re-take the Falklands then could well be a bloody business. The lives of British and Argentinian servicemen could well be lost in the landing and in the bombing of the mainland. Civilian lives might also be jeopardised. It might be expected that these costs could be too great for the government to contemplate this option. And it's true that the international repercussions could be serious. Our allies might be deeply alarmed. However, here at home there's evidence that a very different picture of opinion might emerge. And that would be much more important to the government. There is of course a significant body of British public opinion that opposed the sending of the task force and would be bitterly hostile to the naked use of force now. - But most people have supported the government's policy from the start. It's possible that if additional force were used to take the Falklands people might decide that it was necessary to settle the issue once and for all. But it's also possible that they might feel that it was out of all proportion to the problem. Hitherto many surveys of public opinion have tended to suggest that the latter might be the case. But since most of these surveys were carried out, the fighting has started. To get an up-to-date picture of the state of people's attitudes we asked the polling organisation Opinion Research to question a sample of over a 1,000 people throughout the country. The survey was carried out last Friday. It revealed a remarkable shift in opinion. The sample were asked whether recovery of the Falklands was worth the loss of more British servicemen's lives, if that should prove necessary. Those who said it was amounted to fifty-five per cent. Those who said it wasn't amounted to thirty-eight per cent. Those who didn't know amounted to seven per cent. So a clear majority of people appear to believe that the recovery of the islands is worth the loss of more servicemen's lives. Previous polls have tended to show that the majority were against the loss of any servicemen's lives. So these answers represent a distinct hardening of attitudes.

BRIAN WALDEN.....Cont'd:

The sample were also asked whether, if the Argentinian government refused to compromise and a long-term blockade seemed too risky, the British government should launch an invasion of the islands. Those who said it should amounted to seventy per cent. Those who said it shouldn't amounted to just eighteen per cent. And those who didn't know amounted to twelve per cent. Once again a strikingly tough attitude on the part of the majority of the British public was revealed. This tough attitude was shown by other questions in the survey as well. More than half of the sample said they believed the casualties incurred so far in the conflict were a price worth paying. And three-quarters said that they thought that if Argentina refused to withdraw, Britain should refuse to accept a cease^afire. Overall then, the poll shows the British public is in a remarkably hawkish mood.

JOHN HANVEY:
Chairman - Opinion Research

The broad overall message of this poll seems to be that the attitudes of the British public are toughening very considerably. They are prepared, if it proves necessary, to see more loss of life amongst British servicemen. They are reconciled to the idea, and indeed would support it, that if necessary the government can authorise an invasion of the Falkland Islands in order to recover them. Finally it is quite clear that they do not want to see any weakening of resolve when it comes to a cease^afire before any question of Argentinian withdrawal. They do not want this to happen. So what they seem to be telling the government is please take as tough a measures as you think are necessary and please do not weaken in your resolve in trying to get the Argentinians off the Falkland Islands.

British

BRIAN WALDEN:

Well, it seems that, for the time being at least, the message from the public is that they're prepared to back a hard line. Mrs. Thatcher and her Ministers have always pledged in the past that they would take a hard line if it became necessary. But just how far they're ready to go to do this remains to be seen. John Nott, the Secretary of State for Defence, is with us this morning to discuss the government's intentions.

First of all Mr. Nott, as you know, there have been a series of reports that we have been getting all morning, and all the other news agencies, from Buenos Aires that we have invaded the Falkland Islands. Now our Ministry of Defence, your Ministry of Defence, has officially denied this. Can you confirm that denial?

JOHN NOTT M.P. SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE.

Yes, we have not invaded the Falkland Islands, although we are of course continuing to enforce the total exclusion zone around the islands.

BRIAN WALDEN:

Is anything going on down there that could give any sort of credence to these Argentinian reports?

JOHN NOTT M.P.

Well, we have not launched a full-scale invasion, the activity down there is normally reported to us rather later in the day, but we are certainly ensuring that no supplies of any kind can get into the islands, that have been successful so far, and that is our present policy—to totally isolate the occupying forces on the Falkland Islands.

BRIAN WALDEN:

I notice you used the word that we haven't launched a full-scale invasion. Obviously I'm going to be very careful, almost as careful as you will be in answering me, not to probe into operational matters. But does not launching a full-scale invasion mean that we might have some people on the island who in fact are not launching a full-scale invasion but are

JOHN NOTT M.P.

You are free to speculate as much as you want, Mr. Walden.

BRIAN WALDEN:

And I take it that the speculation would not be entirely frivolous if in fact I did assume that we were taking some preliminary steps to prepare for a possible invasion?

JOHN NOTT M.P.

I can't comment on that.

BRIAN WALDEN:

I understand. Let's ask about this possible invasion. Let me first of all draw your attention to a report that appeared in the Observer newspaper this morning, which suggested that in fact Britain had given Argentina an ultimatum. Namely twenty four hours to get out. If you don't get out we'll throw you out. Is that true? Has the British Government given such an ultimatum?

JOHN NOTT M.P.

No, we've given no such ultimatum. We did originally enforce the maritime exclusion zone successfully, no ships got through, we are now enforcing a total blockade, and that so far has been successful. Two days ago, as you know, we announced a different policy so far as the twelve mile from the shore was concerned, and that is to protect our reinforcement shipping and the very large number of ships which are coming, protected of course by the Royal Navy, to join the task force. The, we, I think the British public understand that it is possible to move from the Argentinian shore into a threatening position against our task force and our reinforcement shipping in bad weather very quickly, and this is something we must protect our fleet against, and we will not hold back in anything at all in the protection of our own ships and men pursuing their task in the South Atlantic.

BRIAN WALDEN:

I want to come back to your statement that we will not hold back from anything at all to protect the ships in the task force. Can I however ask you, because you will well remember the last time you talked to me and indeed things that you have said subsequently. Can I take it that of course there is every likelihood of an invasion of the Falkland Islands to recapture them for our sovereignty if the Argentinian Government maintains its present position?

JOHN NOTT M.P.

Well I see my task, and the task of the Chiefs of Staff, to provide to the Cabinet a range of military options at every stage. It is our job to so place our fleet and their supporting troops in a position that they are able to take a range of options. The Cabinet, under the Prime Minister, will then decide what we do. So that is our policy in the Ministry of Defence, to provide a wide range of options, a wide range of choices of a military nature, should they be required.

BRIAN WALDEN:

So if I were the Prime Minister, and I summoned presumably first the War Cabinet, subsequently the full Cabinet, and talked to the Chiefs of Staff, and decided tomorrow that further diplomatic efforts were quite hopeless - advised by Mr. Pym perhaps that we weren't going to get anywhere and that the Argentinians were simply doing this deliberately to weaken the strength of our task force - and she then turned to you and said 'Well, I think I want to go for an invasion! You have given her the means to do that, have you?

JOHN NOTT M.P.

We are quietly confident that if we have no other choice, that we will be able at the appropriate time to repossess the Falkland Islands by military means.

BRIAN WALDEN:

All right. Now I must ask you about some of the worries that have been expressed about that. Again, of course one doesn't want to know any operational details, I'm talking about the general strategy. Some people say that we haven't got enough men there, and we never will get enough men there to be able to overcome the Argentinian defenders. Now do you accept that?

JOHN NOTT M.P.

Well I think you ought to look first at the quality of our men and their equipment. As I said to you when I was last on this programme, the Royal Marines for instance are an all-volunteer body of professional soldiers, who spend much of their time training in Arctic warfare, they have all the equipment for it. It is quite different from the troops, the Argentinian troops on the island, they are not properly equipped, they are not used to fighting in these conditions. They are isolated from their friends, from supply, and the morale of the troops on the island is going to be a very different, in a very different state from that of our own professional soldiers, who can't be having a very pleasant time tossing around in the South Atlantic, but they are warm and they are properly equipped. It is the quality of our men and equipment which I think will be the key issue, if the time comes.

BRIAN WALDEN:

How do you know that the Argentinian troops on the Falklands are not properly equipped?

JOHN NOTT M.P.

Well, from every report that we receive, it is clear that the morale of those troops, young conscripts, is already low.

BRIAN WALDEN:

I noticed you said, 'If the time comes'. Is that time likely to come sooner or later?

JOHN NOTT M.P.

No, I said that my task is to provide to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet a range of options. Of course what we would like is Resolution 502 of the United Nations to be accepted by the Argentinians. I saw the very hard-line and intransigent interview by the Argentine Minister of Defence, he talked about a peaceful solution, but the United Nations has already declared a mandatory resolution requiring the Argentine occupying forces to withdraw, and that he did not refer to.

BRIAN WALDEN:

I think I must ask you at this point. I want to ask you in a moment about air cover for a possible invasion of the Falklands by our boys - but I think I must ask at this point, because you've said it yourself and I think everybody would agree with you, we'd all like to have a negotiated settlement so that no more blood must be spilled. But you saw what their Minister of Defence said. Does that mean, if that in any sense represents the view of the Argentinian Government, and it must to a considerable extent, does that mean that diplomatically it's now quite hopeless?

JOHN NOTT.M.P.

Well I think we have always expected that the junta might seek to play for time. We always expected that if they could they would take this into the United Nations with the idea of playing it along diplomatically. And I can say quite emphatically that given that that was a possibility and that they were not serious about giving up their spoils, giving up their aggression, being in possession of the islands they were not going to give them up, we have always throughout this thing continued to move forward remorselessly, so if we are forced and have no other choice but to repossess the islands, that will be open to us. And we have not up to now in these past few weeks taken, held back in any way at all, in placing ourselves in the position to make that ultimate choice should it become necessary.

BRIAN WALDEN:

I wonder if I could ask you further on that point, it isn't a matter here of military strategy, but you are a very important member of the War Cabinet. The Argentinian junta doesn't appear to have moved one inch. Is there really any substantial diplomatic hope left at all?

JOHN NOTT M.P.

Yes, I believe there is. I think that the proposals, the outline proposals which have been put forward by the Secretary-General, do not differ in a very major way from the proposals put forward by the Peruvian President and which we accepted last week. You mentioned them at the beginning of your programme, and no-one could suggest that we have been intransigent, there have now been seven or eight different forms of peace proposal. Where we have not, we have been reasonably flexible, we have always said that a precondition is that they obey the mandatory resolution of the United Nations and withdraw. But once they have withdrawn we are prepared to sit down and discuss the long-term future of the islands. But, you're quite right. Every single attempt by us or by the Americans, and latterly the Peruvians, to get them to withdraw has been rejected, and so we could conceivably be faced with the military option in due course.

BRIAN WALDEN:

How long is in due course?

JOHN NOTT M.P.

We that is to some extent constrained by the problems of operating at very long distances from the United Kingdom, and of course the in-coming winter. I must say that the in-coming winter is going to cause horrendous problems for the Argentine occupying forces on the islands, and our troops and our men are relatively well-looked after and provisioned in ships. I'm not saying there is any pleasure about being in a ship in those waters, clearly not.

JOHN NOTT M.P. (CON'TD)

We also now have a reasonably sheltered anchorage, if we need it, in South Georgia not far away, outside the range of their land-based air cover. So we do have a range of options, and we could extend the blockade for far longer, if we wished to, than the amount of supplies that they have available to their forces on the island.

BRIAN WALDEN:

That's also interesting, I see what you mean now by a range of options available. Coming back to the possibility of the invasion option, which the British people plainly would now support, and a lot of today's newspapers are suggesting is very much on the agenda, and switching to the Argentinian air force, which most military strategists seem to think is the real problem, as you saw in our programme. One way you could cope with that of course would be by bombing the Argentinian air fields. Now there are reports in one of today's papers that the Cabinet considered this but ruled it out. Has the Cabinet ruled out an attack on the Argentinian airfields?

JOHN NOTT M.P.

Well, can I say for myself that I do not rule out any option, but there are no plans at present to attack mainland Argentina. There are no such plans at present. What we have been seeking to do from the outset of this affair is to move forward step by step, using no more force than is necessary, in our tremendous efforts to get a peaceful solution to the problem. No, there are no plans at present to bomb the Argentinian mainland, but I'm not ruling out any option in the last resort.

BRIAN WALDEN:

Well that raises certain problems. If we are not going to bomb the Argentinian mainland, and one could quite understand why we wouldn't, because I imagine our own allies wouldn't take that too well. Nevertheless it does raise the whole problem of our air support over the Falklands itself, and it also raises a difficulty with regard to a statement that you made to me earlier in this interview.

BRIAN WALDEN: (CONT'D)

You said we would take all possible measures to defend our task force. Now it may be of course that all possible measures to defend our task force would involve bombing Argentinian air fields. Isn't that so?

JOHN NOTT M.P.

Well, I think that some of the experts rather exaggerate the value, the strength of the Argentinian air force. I don't wish to minimise its dangers. The Argentinian forces are some of the largest and most modern in South America and by no means do I wish to suggest that this will not be a tough fight, if it comes to that. But they only have five Super Etendards, which were the aircraft that attacked the Sheffield, they have other Mirage aircraft, but they really are a decade behind the Harrier, they are ten years behind the Harrier, and beyond that their other aircraft are not particularly modern, some of them are very old, and the Harrier is a very effective aircraft, and now that we can inflight refuel the Harrier we can get down to the South Atlantic as many Harriers as we are likely to need. So that I think we must not exaggerate their air situation, it is certainly significant and we must watch it, but we must not exaggerate it.

BRIAN WALDEN:

Well all right, I must however put this to you, because I think you would want me to put it to you. Some people could misunderstand you to have said, as a result of this interview, well their troops on the Falklands, they're no good, their air force, well that's wildly out of date, that's no good, there's hardly a problem. Now, it isn't that simple is it Mr. Nott?

JOHN NOTT M.P.

No, no, no, I'm saying, which is always I think what I said on this interview three or four weeks ago, in terms of quality of equipment, and certainly quality of training and professionalism, our forces really do not compare. We are undoubtedly superior to them. But in war, if that's what it has to become, things go wrong, and there's not a single person in my department, not a single service officer, who does not understand that if we get into

JOHN NOTT M.P. (CON'T)

a conflict of this kind some ships, some aircraft, some men, may not be lost. That is the way that it happens, and it's deeply grievous if it does, but in spite of our superiority we cannot expect to emerge from this thing without losses, we will have losses.

BRIAN WALDEN:

All right. Can I draw out what I think I've learned from what you've had to tell me. Namely that the position is that you as Defence Secretary have on Mrs. Thatcher's desk a range of options from which she could choose. She could take the diplomatic option, though you're not very hopeful about it, but if there was a chance of a diplomatic settlement that could be done, we have done nothing yet to stop it. That she could take the invasion option, you have got in fact the capacity for that one, she could take the prolonged blockade option if she wanted to do that. Let me ask you this question though, which the minority, and one must admit they are a minority, the minority of the British people who don't support you on this are asking all the time. Namely the question of proportion. All right, all of these things, invasion, prolonged blockade, might be able to be done, but how many casualties are proportionate to the righting of this particular wrong? Is there any line that you would draw that you wouldn't go beyond?

JOHN NOTT M.P.

Yes, well, this is British territory and these are British people, and British sovereignty is a fact, it cannot be removed by aggression, but if they withdraw we are prepared to discuss the long term future of the islands, that is a British question. But there is an international question at stake, and that is that if we the British have to be a country which in support of democracy and freedom stands up against this kind of abuse, then so be it, and history will remember that it was the British people that stood firm against aggression. And that has much wider implications for the world than our little problem on the Falkland Islands, and I don't doubt that some support internationally could conceivably fall away from us if the going gets rough. But historians will look back and say, 'Well, they, the British, they stood out against aggression and there

JOHN NOTT M.P. (CONT'D)

are hundreds of border disputes all over the world. The Russians have marched into Afghanistan, and let us remember that if we falter here because people shrink from taking action, then this will happen repeatedly all around the world and the threat from the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact allies will grow.

BRIAN WALDEN:

That's a very controversial statement, of course that doesn't mean that it's right and it doesn't mean that it's wrong, but it is very controversial and I want to press you on it. You seem to be saying that the principles involved here are so important that even if we were to lose some international support by pursuing what you take to be the right course, you would bear that loss, and even if we did have to sustain a considerable number of casualties, more than many people would wish, you would bear that loss too because the issue is so crucial.

JOHN NOTT M.P.

Well, let me say that we clearly are bending everything to place ourselves in a position that if that final conflict comes we have the minimum number of casualties, and that is why some of the intermediate steps that we are taking are taken in the knowledge that we may be forced in a few weeks or a few months time to take further military action. We mustn't shrink for a day now in moving forward, because if we do that might mean more casualties later in the process. Although I hope that this weekend we will solve the thing. But yes, there is a general principle at stake, and some people may fall away from us, but in ten years' time, and in twenty years' time the historians will look back and say, the British stood up against aggression, they showed the way, they showed that Western democratic principles must be supported.

BRIAN WALDEN:

Well it will be very cheering to have the historians on our side in the future, but I wonder if I could ask you about the practical difficulties of the present. Surely if we do go ahead in this particular way we could

JOHN NOTT M.P.

I think, I wouldn't say that. I was in with NATO last week, and there was strong support for us among the NATO countries.

BRIAN WALDEN:

All right, I must stop you there Mr. Nott, thank you very much indeed for a most revealing interview, thank you.