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# Britain to blockade Falkland Islands

By Ian Aitken,  
Political Editor

Britain announced last night that a naval blockade would be mounted on the Falkland Islands from next Monday.

Mr John Nott, the Defence Secretary, told the Commons that any Argentine ship within a 200-mile zone round the islands would be liable to British attack.

Mr Nott's announcement took MPs totally by surprise, in the closing stages of a full day's debate in which Labour spokesmen had furiously attacked the Prime Minister and demanded to be told what plans she had for the British fleet now on its way to the South Atlantic.

But the meaning of Mr Nott's announcement is, in effect, that there is already a British naval presence in the area of the Falkland Islands. Since HMS Superb, the nuclear powered submarine, is already there.

She will therefore be ready to sink Argentine vessels within the 200-mile zone from the time stated by Mr Nott — 0400 hours GMT on Easter Monday.

Mr Francis Pym, delivering his maiden speech as Foreign Secretary, dwelt at length on the crucial importance of diplomacy in a manner which would have been rejected as appeasement last Saturday.

Mr Denis Healey, for the

Opposition, stepped back from Labour's earlier belligerence and made it clear that there would be no Opposition blank cheques for the Government on the use of force.

Mr Pym's was an impressive performance in extraordinarily difficult circumstances. Although he can have been armed with little better than a Foreign Office brief for his

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speech he succeeded in printing his own personality on it. His tone was firm, vigorous and authoritative.

And yet his message was rather less than belligerent. Indeed, he startled MPs on both sides of the Commons by appearing to amend earlier assurances that the objective of British policy was to restore British sovereignty in the Falkland Islands. Instead, he employed the word "administration."

This caused a stir on the Tory benches, and was picked up by former premier Mr James Callaghan in a magisterial intervention from the back benches. He pointed out that there had already been negotiations on the possibility of altering the terms of Britain's

occupation of the Falkland Islands, perhaps to the extent of a condominium or even the surrender of sovereignty in exchange for a temporary "lease-back."

He challenged Mr Pym and the Prime Minister to clarify the position and succeeded in needling them so much that both came to the dispatch box to answer his point. Their

answers, however, did not satisfy him. Mrs Thatcher confined herself to saying that it was the wishes of the islanders which were paramount.

Mr Callaghan proposed that the Government set up a special group of ministers inside the Cabinet to take responsibility for the Falklands operation with a minister "not distracted by day to day affairs" to take charge.

He urged Mrs Thatcher to look to experienced backbenchers in these appointments. Mr Heath, whose qualifications match Mr Callaghan's specifications, remained mute.

But Mr Pym's opening speech, though it contained a ferocious denunciation of the domestic regime of the Argentinian junta, also asserted that

there would be time to do everything possible to solve the problem peacefully before the British task force reached the area.

In contrast to some of the utterances of Mrs Thatcher and her Defence Secretary, Mr Nott, the New Foreign Secretary declared: "We would much prefer a peaceful settlement. We will do all we can to get one. And we shall welcome and support all serious efforts to that end."

Hitherto, ministers have tended to suggest that there was little prospect of a diplomatic solution, and have relied on the rattling of Britain's seaborne sabres. But Mr Pym told MPs that the House and the country should be in no doubt about the Government's desire to seek a diplomatic solution.

Only if those efforts failed, he said, would the question of violence re-enter the equation. In that case, he added, the Argentine regime would know what to expect. "Britain does not appease dictators."

Mr Pym's approach may well have been facilitated by the surprisingly wide support which Britain has secured from its friends, allies, and even enemies. He was emphatic throughout his speech on the need for the entire world to bring pressure on Argentina to

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