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| Margaret Thatcher, Speech to Conservative Women's Conference, 1982 May 26 Margaret Thatcher Foundation, http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104948 | Code Sujet | CCV |
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Madam Chairman,

5 The older generation in our country, and generations before them, have made sacrifices so that we could be a free society and belong to a community of nations which seeks to resolve disputes by civilised means. Today it falls to us to bear the same responsibility, we shall not shirk it. What has happened since that day, eight weeks ago, is a matter of history—the history of a nation which rose instinctively to the needs of the occasion.

10 For decades, the peoples of the Falkland Islands had enjoyed peace—with freedom,—peace with justice, peace with democracy. They are our people and let no one doubt our profound longing for peace. But that peace was shattered by a wanton act of armed aggression by Argentina in blatant violation of international law. And everything that has happened since has stemmed from the invasion by the military dictatorship of Argentina. And sometimes I feel people need reminding of that fact more often. We want peace restored. But we want it with the same freedom, justice and democracy that the Islanders previously enjoyed.

15 For seven weeks we sought peace by diplomatic means; through the good offices of our close friend and ally, the United States; through the unremitting efforts of the Secretary General of the United Nations. We studied seven sets of proposals and finally we drew up our own. Without compromising fundamental principles, we made a variety of reasonable and practical suggestions in a supreme effort to avoid conflict and loss of life. We worked tirelessly for a peaceful solution. But when there is no response of substance from the other side, there comes

20 a point when it is no longer possible to trust the good faith of those with whom one is negotiating. Playing for time is not working for a peaceful solution. Wasting time is not willing a peaceful solution. It is simply leaving the aggressor with the fruits of his aggression. It would be a betrayal of our fighting men and of the Islanders if we had continued merely to

25 talk, when talk alone was getting nowhere. And so, seven weeks to the day after the invasion, we moved to recover by force what was taken from us by force. It cannot be said too often: We are the victims; they are the aggressors. We came to military action reluctantly. But when territory which has been British for almost 150 years is seized and occupied; when not only British land, but British citizens, are in the power of an aggressor; then we have to restore our

30 rights and the rights of the Falkland Islanders.

There have been a handful of questioning voices raised here at home. I would like to answer them. It has been suggested that the size of the Falkland Islands and the comparatively small number of its inhabitants—some 1,800 men, women and children—should somehow affect our reaction to what has happened to them. To those—not many—who speak lightly of a few Islanders beyond the seas and who ask the question: “Are the few worth fighting for?”

35 Let me say this:- Right and wrong are not measured by a head-count of those to whom that wrong has been done. That would not be principle but expediency. And the Falklanders, remember, are not strangers. They are our own people. As the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Rob Muldoon and what a marvellous friend he is. He went to the heart of the matter

40 in his usual straightforward way. “With the Falkland Islanders”, he said “it is family”. When their land was invaded and their homes were overrun, they naturally turned to us for help, and we, their fellow citizens, 8,000 miles away in our own much larger island, could not and did not beg to be excused. We sent our men and our ships with all speed, hoping against hope that we would not have to use them in battle but prepared to do so if all attempts at a peaceful

45 solution failed. When those attempts did fail, we could not sail by on the other side. And let me add this. If we, the British, were to shrug our shoulders at what had happened in the South Atlantic and to acquiesce in the illegal seizure of those far-away islands, it would be a clear signal to those with similar designs on the territory of others to follow in the footsteps of aggression. Surely we, of all people, have learned the lesson of history: that to appease an

50 aggression is to invite aggression elsewhere, and on an ever-increasing scale? Other voices—again only a few—have accused us of clinging to colonialism or even imperialism. Let us remind those who advance that argument that we British have a record second to none of leading colony after colony to freedom and independence. We cling not to colonialism but to self-determination of peoples everywhere.

