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UNITED KINGDOM MISSION
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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Dear John,

THE FALKLANDS, ARGENTINA AND THE UN

When you were here last week we discussed possible UN angles. We have been asking ourselves in the Mission whether it would now be useful from our own point of view for the islanders to be exposed to the UN and its decolonisation committees. My answer is that it is unlikely that any useful purpose would be served at this stage. It may help for me to explain why, in case you are examining strategy for the months ahead.

2. My impression from the talks was that the islanders were somewhat taken aback at the strength and genuineness of feeling on the Argentine side. This did not mean of course that they felt that our own case on sovereignty was any weaker. But this exposure did seem to have helped a little in bringing them to a more realistic and pragmatic view of their future. One question is therefore whether exposure to other UN delegations who sympathise with the Argentine claim would further soften up the islanders and whether the UN could help in opening up for them some new perspectives, as we have been trying to do for years. On the other side, would the appearance of islanders as petitioners to the Fourth Committee, or even an invitation to the Committee of 24 to send a visiting mission to the Falklands, elicit a more sympathetic approach from the UN and induce the Committee of 24 and the General Assembly to moderate their attitude which has till now been appallingly one-sided?

3. We are frankly pessimistic about the extent to which participation in the work of the Fourth Committee could open up new horizons for the islanders. If anything the sterile clichés and the empty rhetoric would probably harden their prejudices into an even more Victorian patriotism. I fear that, being more British than the British, they would be treated by delegations here as representatives of the colonialist rather than as a colonial people struggling to achieve the legitimate right to self-determination. And the Argentines would probably have to put on a more nationalistic posture in public to contrast with their friendly and reassuring approach in bilateral consultations.

4. The bolder idea of a Committee of 24 visiting mission would also pose considerable problems and could backfire. We would of course need the approval and support of the Argentines before floating this idea and they would, I imagine, be suspicious of our motives. But, even if we stage-managed the composition of the mission so that we had friendly

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delegates with some appreciation of our motives, there is no telling what would happen in the Islands. Our recent experience of visiting missions has shown that public meetings can easily get out of hand, as much through excitability in the audiences as through any lack of tact or diplomacy on the part of visitors. The terms of reference of the mission, though essentially 'fact finding', would probably be misinterpreted and I am sure the trip would be seen in the Islands as a ruse, with British connivance, to force independence down the islanders' throats. I imagine it would also be so construed by the Falkland Islands lobby in London. It is of course possible that the mission would come away with a deeper understanding of the islanders' reluctance to become independent or to join Argentina. We could expect a little more attention to be paid to the 'self determination' aspects of resolution 1514 which have in the past been subordinated to the idea of integrity of Argentina's national boundaries and their sovereignty dispute. But the seal has been set on the Argentine legal case at successive non-aligned summits, if not yet formally at the United Nations, and I cannot see a more favourable current of thought being built up which might enable us to obtain more even-handed treatment from the Committee of 24 and the Fourth Committee.

5. I therefore come down firmly on the side of the status quo so far as our tactics in the UN are concerned. I think our interests are best served by the question of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) being deferred from one UNGA session to the next, and I think we should aim to delay as long as possible any repetition of the 1976 resolution. The Committee of 24 seem content with the current arrangement and no activist delegation is pushing the Argentine case in an awkward way for us. However, if the question comes alive through any initiative of ours there is guaranteed to be a thumping majority in favour of any resolution the Argentines may care to dream up. The best way of educating the islanders towards international realities is therefore likely to be on a local level and through the continuing bilateral negotiations; not, I fear, through the UN.

Yours ever

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A D Parsons

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