

Prime Minister: Hugh Thomas left this  
with me before Christmas. You may like to  
glance through it.

THE GIBRALTAR CONFERENCE AT SEGOVIA, DECEMBER 1979

Note by Hugh Thomas  
11th December 1979

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1. This conference was organised by the recently founded Spanish "Institute for International Questions". Present were British and Spanish politicians and dons, a few businessmen and some rather unrepresentative usually pro-Spanish Gibraltarians ("doves"). The conference was well-managed, except that, after the appointed hour at which the meeting was due to end, and after most of the British representatives (including myself) had already left for the airport in taxis pre-arranged by the conference staff, a foolish resolution calling for the opening of negotiations was (to my mind improperly) passed by acclamation.

2. The discussions at this conference revolved round the fairly obvious argument put forward by the British speakers that before any serious discussion could begin, the Spaniards would have to remove, or at least modify, the present restrictions; and the complementary demands from the Spaniards that "negotiations" ought to begin without preconditions. Some Spaniards, however, including General Díaz Alegria, the president of the Institute, hoped that the frontier might be opened for Christmas: a point of view naturally strongly supported by the Gibraltarians. Something may come of this idea.

3. There was one sense in which this conference was a historic occasion since no such tripartite gathering had ever occurred before. On the other hand, it afforded several Spanish politicians, such as Fernando Morán, the socialist senator for Asturias, an all too good opportunity to insist that the question of Gibraltar had to be solved before there could be any question of Spain joining the North Atlantic Alliance (of which policy, Señor Morán is anyway an opponent).

4. It was also difficult to persuade even well-disposed Spaniards present that Britain's position is really determined by our obligations to the Gibraltarian population, which had voted so overwhelmingly in the referendum of 1967, in favour of maintaining the British link. The Spaniards thought these points merely a guileful justification for maintaining a long-term interest in the Rock for strategic reasons.

5. I also tried unsuccessfully to argue that the present restrictions on access, as well as the extremely unpleasant face that the Spaniards have shown to Gibraltar, were all a part of the legacy of General Franco's days. On this subject, the Spaniards showed that continuity in foreign policy between the old and the present regime was almost absolute.

6. The most important point made by the Spaniards seemed to be one which stressed that, whether or no the British had global strategic reasons any more for maintaining Gibraltar, they, the Spaniards, had a legitimate concern for their own security (which we had neglected <sup>allegedly</sup> ~~already~~), in the light of possible changes in the military balance in Morocco and North Africa. This was the best of the Spanish arguments and it was quite refreshing to hear, for the first time, serious discussion of real strategic questions by responsible Spanish officers.

7. Four other points are worth mentioning:-

- (i) several Spaniards, including one who read a paper (Professor Campos), said that the people in the area of the Campo de Gibraltar (the immediate hinterland of the Rock) were convinced that nuclear weapons are held at Gibraltar. They argued that this could risk a nuclear explosion and hence loss of life in the zone. I suspect that we have not heard the last of this argument;
- (ii) one Gibraltarian, Tito Benody, said to me privately on several occasions that, if there were ever any consideration by us of a change in the status of Gibraltar, before or after the entry of Spain into the European Economic Community or of NATO, he and all other "doves" (and, of course, all others) would try and insist that the autonomous status, which Spain

has been known for years to be willing to contemplate, should be concerned specifically with them and not considered as one historic act merged in the Campo de Gibraltar.

This is a natural preoccupation for them; La Linea now has a population of 60,000 opposed to Gibraltar's 25,000 or so. This side to the problem might be further complicated when Andalusia (of which the Campo de Gibraltar is, of course, a part) has its own autonomous government. It will probably be a socialist government and perhaps one explicitly hostile to NATO;

(iii) as usual when talking with Spaniards over the past year, Spanish entry into the Community was taken for granted, and thought to be generally desirable (all the Spaniards looked pained when John Roper MP suggested that Britain would hardly be able to give unstinted support to the idea of Spanish entry if the restrictions at the Gibraltarian frontier were maintained\*). At the same time all thought that entry into NATO would be a more difficult matter. Most Spaniards think of the idea of joining NATO as something plainly to be in the interests of the other members of the Alliance but have not been persuaded

\*And even more when it was rather brutally suggested that Britain might be tempted to raise the question of the restrictions at the Madrid meeting on European security.

that it would be a good way of guaranteeing Spain's own security - perhaps better than the US-Spanish alliance. Aldofo Suárez has made evident that he could not contemplate pressing the question of Spain's membership of NATO till after the conference on European security; even so the opponents of Spanish entry are on the warpath; this is one of the many issues where the Soviet Union and the Spanish communist party see eye to eye. I suppose that it can be assumed that the present Spanish government will have the stomach for the fight which this policy will entail but there are one or two danger signs. (The kidnapping of Javier Rupérez, still kept in presumably brutal confinement after a month, may have some connection with this, for Señor Rupérez, as a foreign policy advisor of Señor Suárez, as well as deputy, must be expected to know what is in the Prime Minister's mind on these questions.) In the debate over Spanish entry into NATO, the question of Gibraltar will certainly be constantly brought up and I suspect that the Spaniards will, one day, start talking seriously to the other allies on the subject of the inter-connection. One of the military persons present at the conference said that most Spaniards would not understand the idea of having an alliance with a country which occupied what they regard as a part of Spain,

(iv) the British rather lightly touched the question of ~~Ceuta~~<sup>Ceuta</sup> Melilla and the other small Spanish possessions off North Africa but there was not much discussion of them, though it was quite a good idea to show that we knew of those matters.

8. My own contribution to the general debate which occurred in the last day of the conference was to press for the abolition of the restrictions as soon as possible, the formation of a deliberate policy by Spain to be friendly to Gibraltarians and to try thereafter and win their case for recapturing Gibraltar by argument and debate. If a majority of Gibraltarians clearly wanted to join Spain, I doubted whether any British government would stand in their way though Spanish entry into NATO, and perhaps agreement on a jointly operated NATO base, would make that more likely still.

12 DEC 1979





Submitted to P.M.

JS  
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10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

12 December 1979

Many thanks for letting me have the note which you have prepared on the Gibraltar Conference at Segovia. I look forward to reading it with interest and will seek an opportune moment to bring it to the Prime Minister's attention.

M. O'D. B. ALEXANDER

Hugh Thomas, Esq.

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12.XI.1979

Dear Michael

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interested in a report I wrote  
about our Critterator conference

Yours ever

Hugh

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