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TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TEL NO 242 OF 27 MARCH 1985

INFO IMMEDIATE LISBON (FOR SUS'S PARTY

INFO ROUTINE WASHINGTON PORT STANLEY BUENOS AIRES BERNE
BRASILIA

MY TELNO 234: VISIT OF PRESIDENT ALFONSIN TO NEW YORK

SUMMARY

1. THE SECRETARY GENERAL BRIEFS ME ON HIS TALKS WITH PRESIDENT ALFONSIN. I RESPOND APPROPRIATELY.

DETAIL

2. THE SECRETARY GENERAL MADE GOOD HIS INTENTION TO DEBRIEF ME HIMSELF ON HIS TALKS WITH PRESIDENT ALFONSIN BY CALLING ME IN THIS AFTERNOON, 27 MARCH. HIS SPECIAL ASSISTANT WAS WITH HIM AND THE HEAD OF CHANCERY WITH ME.

3. EXPLAINING THAT HE FELT IT TO BE HIS 'DUTY' TO GIVE ME AN ACCOUNT OF HIS MEETING WITH PRESIDENT ALFONSIN, THE SECRETARY GENERAL SAID THAT IN ORDER NOT TO MISLEAD ME HE HAD PREPARED A SPEAKING NOTE IN ENGLISH. HE PROCEEDED TO READ FROM THIS, DIVIDING WHAT ALFONSIN HAD SAID INTO ARGENTINE POLICY TOWARDS THE FALKLANDS AND ARGENTINE 'COMPLAINTS'.

4. ON THE FORMER, THE SECRETARY GENERAL SAID THAT ALFONSIN HAD INSISTED ON THE NEED FOR ADIALOGUE BETWEEN THE UK AND ARGENTINA WITH AN OPEN AGENDA. ALFONSIN WAS NOT ATTEMPTING TO MODIFY THE BRITISH POSITION ON THE SUBSTANCE AT THIS STAGE. HE WELL UNDERSTOOD THAT SOVEREIGNTY COULD NOT BE DEALT WITH AT THE OUTSET. BUT BRITAIN MUST UNDERSTAND THAT ARGENTINA COULD NOT ACCEPT THAT SOVEREIGNTY BE SPEARATED FROM A PACKAGE FOR DISCUSSION BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES. ALFONSIN HAD INSISTED THAT ARGENTINA WAS NOT ENGAGED IN AN ARMS BUILD UP. REFERENCES TO PURCHASES OF 'SOPHISTICATED WEAPONRY', IN PARTICULAR FROM ISRAEL, MIGHT BE TO SIX OR SEVEN AIRCRAFT FOR THE ARGENTINE NAVY PAID FOR BEFORE ALFONSIN CAME TO POWER.

5. ON THE LATTER, THE SECRETARY GENERAL PASSED ON TWO POINTS:-

A) ALFONSIN WAS CONCERNED THAT, WHEN THE MOUNT PLEASANT AIRFIELD WAS FINISHED, BRITAIN MIGHT ATTEMPT TO CARRY OUT SOME SORT OF 'SHOW OF STRENGTH', E.G. FLYING IN A SQUADRON OF AIRCRAFT FROM A DISTANT BASE, WHICH WOULD CREATE TENSION AND PROMPT A RAPID DIPLOMATIC RESPONSE,

B) BRITISH ANBASSADORS EVERYWHERE WERE BELABOURING THE POINT THAT THE DEMOCRATIC REGIME IN ARGENTINA WOULD NOT LAST: THIS WAS A WAY OF WEAKENING ALFONSINS EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACY.

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6. IN CONCLUSION THE SECRETARY GENERAL SAID THAT ALFONSIN WAS UNDER THE IMPRESSION THAT BRITAIN HAD DECIDED TO SEEK A NEW BERNE EXERCISE, THOUGH HE HAD NOT ELABORATED ON THIS POINT. DE SOTO SAID THAT THE ARGENTINES WERE RELUCTANT TO ENGAGE IN A SIMILAR EXERCISE THOUGH THEY HAD DEFINITELY NOT DISCARDED THE PROTECTING POWER CHANNEL.

7. I THANKED THE SECRETARY GENERAL FOR HIS BRIEFING AND GAVE HIM WHAT I DESCRIBED AS A PRELIMINARY RESPONSE. I SAID THAT ON TWO POINTS OF FACT:-

- A) I COULD ONLY UNDERLINE WHAT MRS THATCHER HAD SAID TO THE SECRETARY GENERAL HIMSELF ABOUT ARMS PURCHASES,
- B) I WAS TOTALLY UNAWARE OF ANY BRITISH AMBASSADOR HAVING DONE ANY SUCH THING: THIS WOULD BE CONTRARY TO OUR HOPES AS I MYSELF AS BRITISH AMBASSADOR TO THE UN HAD MADE CLEAR IN A NUMBER OF SPEECHES.

8. SO FAR AS ALFONSINS REFERENCE TO THE AIRFIELD WAS CONCERNED I FOUND 'SHOW OF STRENGTH' A RATHER OFFENSIVE FORMULATION FROM THE ARGENTINE SIDE, ESPECIALLY GIVEN THAT ALFONSIN HAD SAID THAT HE WAS NOT ATTEMPTING TO MODIFY THE BRITISH POSITION ON THE SUBSTANCE. I WONDERED WHETHER IT WOULD BE IN ORDER FOR US TO OBJECT TO PLANES LANDING IN BUENOS AIRES. THE PURPOSE OF AN AIRFIELD WAS TO LAND AIRCRAFT. THE FUNCTION OF THE MOUNT PLEASANT AIRFIELD WOULD BE DUAL: ON THE ONE HAND CIVIL AND ON THE OTHER MILITARY TO PREVENT A REPETITION OF OUR UNHAPPY EXPERIENCE OF 1982 OF BEING INVADED WITH ONLY 40 ODD ARMED MEN IN THE GARRISON. THE OPENING OF THE AIRFIELD WOULD ENABLE US TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF TROOPS IN THE FALKLANDS.. THUS ALFONSINS SUGGESTION WAS PECULIARLY UNCALLED FOR.

9. SO FAR AS ALFONSINS POLICY STATEMENTS HAD BEEN CONCERNED I SENSED A HARDENING OF THE ARGENTINE POSITION. WE WERE READY TO DISCUSS A CONSIDERABLE NUMBER OF QUESTIONS WHICH WOULD BE THE BETTER FOR DISCUSSION. THIS MADE US SORRY ABOUT THE ARGENTINE ALL OR NOTHING APPROACH AS EXEMPLIFIED IN THE ARGENTINE PRESS STATEMENT OF 2 JANUARY WHICH REFERRED TO 'UNRENOUNCEABLE RIGHTS OF SOVEREIGNTY'. THE WHOLE ARGENTINE EXERCISE SEEMED TO BE BASED ON A ONE WAY STREET. THAT SAID I WOULD REPORT WHAT THE SECRETARY GENERAL HAD SAID AND WOULD KEEP HIM INFORMED OF ANY DEVELOPMENTS. THE SECRETARY GENERAL COMMENTED THAT WE HAD BEEN 'IMPECCABLE' IN THIS RESPECT.

THOMSON

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