

MR. COLES ✓

Prime Minister
This will be helpful to have by
you for the debate.

A.V.C. 19.
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FRANKS REPORT

1. The Prime Minister asked me to look into the question whether the FCO had been dilatory in dealing with the proposed message from Lord Carrington to Costa Mendez (para 147).
2. On the face of it, it does look as though the draft took a leisurely course. It was prepared after the meeting on 5 March and dispatched for clearance by the Island Councils on 8 March (para 154). The Islanders agreed the message on 16 March and a draft was submitted to Lord Carrington on 18 March (paras 154 and 155). Lord Carrington subsequently decided to circulate the draft to his colleagues with a minute of 24 March (para 156). By that time it had been overtaken by events in South Georgia and was never sent. In para 301, the Report suggests that no paper was tabled for OD in mid-March because Lord Carrington thought it right to await Costa Mendez's response to his message - which, in the event, was never sent.
3. In fact, my researches with the FCO reveal that the situation was not as bad as it looks from the Report. The Department submitted a draft message on the day of Lord Carrington's office meeting - 5 March. The weekend intervened and the message was sent on Monday, 8 March for clearance with the Islanders. For geographical reasons it was impossible to convene the Councils until 16 March. The Governor reported their agreement to the message in a telegram which arrived in the FCO late on 17 March. So far so good.
4. On Thursday, 18 March the Department recommended that the message should be sent. This reached Lord Carrington's office late on Friday, 19 March after it had been seen by Mr. Luce. It was decided that it should go into Lord Carrington's weekend box. The Department's view was that it was neither necessary nor particularly appropriate for our Ambassador in Buenos Aires to deliver this delicate message over the weekend. It was therefore acceptable for the telegram to issue on the following Monday.
5. However, news of the South Georgia incident reached the FCO on 20 March. Lord Carrington held an office meeting on Monday, 22 March to discuss the events of the weekend and their effect on the draft

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submitted the previous week. In the new circumstances, it was agreed at this meeting that Lord Carrington should not send his message to Costa Mendez until his OD colleagues had had an opportunity to comment on his proposed minute to the Prime Minister (of 24 March).

6. This sequence of events does not seem to me to be in any way blameworthy. It was not unreasonable, without hindsight, that the draft telegram agreed on 5 March should not have issued until 8 March. Equally, there was no avoiding the delay in its consideration by the Island Councils. This brings us to 17 March. Again, without hindsight, it was not unreasonable that the dispatch of the telegram was held up over the weekend. By that time, South Georgia had happened and the question of the message to Costa Mendez became bound up with consideration of the South Georgia crisis.
7. Equally, it was not as if nothing had happened in the meantime. On 3 March (para 140) Mr. Luce had sent a personal message to Ros about the unilateral communique. On 4 March (para 141) Mr. Williams had seen Ros who had responded to Mr. Luce's message. He had also seen Costa Mendez on 5 March. On 6 or 7 March (para 144) Tom Enders had talked to the Argentines (not very effectively) at Mr. Luce's request. On 8 March, Lord Carrington had instructed the Embassy in Washington to speak to Secretary Haig, who replied on 15 March (para 157). Hence, the abortive message to Costa Mendez was by no means the only diplomatic ball on the field between the end of the New York talks and the South Georgia incident.

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A.D. PARSONS
18 January 1983