



Prime Minister

Agree that :-

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

(a) we should ask the Red Cross
to clarify the details of this proposal?

Yes - the letter

14 March 1983

(b) the Islanders should be consulted before
a final decision? Yes

is contradictory

(c) the matter should be put to you for
final decision? Yes

A. & C. $\frac{14}{3}$.

Dear John,

We also need more details of
the organisation itself.

Possible Visit by Argentine Next-of-Kin

Since I wrote to you on 7 March, we have received the request which Destefanis has put in to the ICRC. I enclose an unofficial translation. Some of it is in offensively nationalistic terms; the definition of the composition of the proposed group is not entirely clear; and it is not specific about the nationality of the ship in which the group would travel, although there is a reference to vessels flying the Argentine flag. We remain uncertain of the involvement of the Argentine Government, though still generally suspicious that they may use Destefanis to embarrass us, both in the arrangements for our own next-of-kin visit and more generally.

However, the organisers claim that their project is purely humanitarian, and they declare themselves 'ready to offer every reasonable safeguard' that the ICRC might ask of them 'to maintain the peaceful and apolitical character' of the proposed visit. The next step could be to take up this and other points with the ICRC, with whom Mr Hurd had a helpful exploratory conversation in Geneva on 10 March (in the course of which they made clear that they were not at this stage making any request of us, although they had passed on Destefanis's letter).

First, though, we must be clear whether we would not prefer to turn the request down outright, or say, for example, that though we would not be prepared to accept any Argentine group between now and 15 May - the date they propose - we hope relations between our countries might put us in a position to take a more favourable view later in the year. A formal Argentine declaration that hostilities were at an end would produce a climate more conducive to a visit. But this looks unlikely. In any case the Foreign and Commonwealth

/Secretary



Secretary thinks it would be wrong to reject out of hand an approach for a suitably-prepared visit of a bona fide group of relatives. But Destefanis has some way to go if he is to persuade us that this is what he is planning. Some opinion in Britain and, to judge by the Civil Commissioner's personal assessment, unanimous opinion in the Islands, will be critical of us when we allow any Argentine to set foot on the Islands, for any purpose. But we could also, through refusal, expose ourselves to charges of inflexibility; and it would be consistent with our conduct so far over the Argentine dead at least to give a fair hearing to the present application. Moreover, as I explained in my earlier letter, the threat the Argentine operation poses to our own next-of-kin visit is serious, and the minor adjustment in the timing proposed by the group has done nothing to remove it (although it could be of use to us tactically).

The latter point is of particular concern to the Ministry of Defence, but we must take account of the risks of embarrassing incidents, or worse, if we reject the request. For example, if a group were to set out in a vessel of a third country - and there have been suggestions that Destefanis might hire a Uruguayan boat - the rules of engagement for our ships would be extremely difficult to draw up.

Mr Pym therefore believes that we should now seek to find out more about the Destefanis operation. He proposes to engage the active assistance of the ICRC and to ask them to clarify the intentions of the Argentine Government regarding this visit, as well as asking for details and taking up Destefanis's offer to provide safeguards. These, which we would work out with the ICRC, would have to include measures to ensure the careful control of the group on the Islands, and the timing and duration of the visit as well as checking the credentials of each member of the Argentine group. In the light of Destefanis's response to these conditions we will be in a better position to take a final decision on how we should respond.

I am copying this to Richard Mottram (MOD) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Your ever

John Holmes

(J E Holmes)
Private Secretary

4 MAR 1937



UNOFFICIAL TRANSLATION

Buenos Aires, 24 February 1983

Mr Alexander Hay
President of the ICRC
Geneva
Switzerland

Dear Sir

We have the pleasure of writing to you to request, through you, the support and protection of the International Red Cross to enable us thereby to fulfil a mission of a completely humanitarian nature to which we are currently pledged.

The Centre of Volunteers for the Fatherland, a civilian organisation completely independent of the Argentine Government, has decided to organise a journey to the Malvinas Islands with the purpose of rendering posthumous homage to those who have given their lives fighting in defence of Argentina's territorial sovereignty and who lie buried in Malvinas cemeteries.

Only civilian citizens and relatives of our dead will take part in this journey; as you will understand, this is a question of an absolutely humanitarian mission, with no political content !

We consider that no civilised nation can deny the right of a father, a mother or a wife to render a last Christian homage to their son or husband at his place of burial.

Aware as we are of the state of belligerency which exists between our country and England and of the constant attacks to which non-military vessels flying the Argentine flag are subjected by the English fleet, even in international waters, we are requesting the intervention of your Organisation so that the Argentine relatives may be guaranteed one of the most fundamental human rights recognised by the international community.

/We

We declare that we are ready to offer every reasonable safeguard that your Organisation might ask of us to maintain the peaceful and apolitical character of this journey.


We equally wish to inform you that to the same end we have written to the Secretary General of the United Nations, Javier Perez de Cuellar, requesting the protection of the highest world organisation for this expedition.

Therefore, and assuming the support of both organisations for a cause which, beyond its material aspects, will serve to give spiritual comfort to those who have suffered the irreparable loss of their dear ones, we would be grateful for your personal intervention and that of the International Red Cross.

Finally, we would like it to be noted, without wishing it to seem an imposition, that the journey will have to take place in the first fortnight in May at the latest, since once autumn has set in the climatic conditions which prevail in the South Atlantic would make it extremely dangerous. We therefore ask for your immediate attention to this request so that the journey can take place without hindrance before that date.

With respectful wishes, and awaiting your response.

Oswaldo B L Destefanis
President



Argentina,
Relatrens, P733





10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

15 March 1983

POSSIBLE VISIT BY ARGENTINE NEXT-OF-KIN

Thank you for your letter of 14 March.

The Prime Minister agrees with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary that we should ask the Red Cross to clarify the details of the request which Destefanis has made to them. Mrs. Thatcher has observed that Destefanis' letter, a translation of which you enclosed, is contradictory in several respects. In particular, he states that the proposed visit has no political content. But he also states that the purpose of the visit is to do homage to those who have given their lives fighting "in defence of Argentina's territorial sovereignty". Mrs. Thatcher believes that, in addition to the points you have mentioned, we need more information about the "Centre of Volunteers for the Fatherland", the body which is said to be organising the journey.

The Prime Minister has further commented that the Islanders should of course be consulted before a final decision is taken. She would like to be kept fully informed about any further developments and would be grateful if the problem could be brought to her attention again when we have all the information necessary for a final decision to be taken.

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

A. J. COLES

J.E. Holmes, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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