

Ref: B06750

PRIME MINISTER

c Sir Robert Armstrong

OD(EM): Possible Visit to the Falkland Islands
by Argentine Next-of-Kin

BACKGROUND

Flag A

You are familiar with the earlier background which was set out in a letter of 7th March from the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's Private Secretary to Mr Coles. Subsequent information from Buenos Aires suggests that, in the absence of an answer to his request, Senor Destefanis may sail any way. He has claimed to the International Committee of the Red Cross that he has a ship at his disposal and that 211 relatives of Argentine soldiers killed in the fighting are ready to make the journey. The local ICRC representative believes that Senor Destefanis is trying to extract a decision from the United Kingdom by 2nd April, the anniversary of the Argentine invasion. Ministers agreed after OD on 24th March that if the Destefanis party sailed without British authorisation aggressive action should be avoided: the aim should be to escort the vessels to a suitable mooring point, after which the position could be further considered. Meanwhile consideration should be given to making an early public statement to the effect that we could consider a visit by Argentine next-of-kin only if it were organised by the ICRC and carried out strictly under their auspices.

Flag B

2. Since then Sir Rex Hunt has reported (his signal of 24th March) the reluctance of the Falkland Islands Executive Council to accept a visit of the Destefanis group (unless Argentina first declares a formal cessation of hostilities) and has drawn attention to the fact that permission to allow such a visit is the responsibility of the Falkland Islands Government rather than the British Government. We have also made a further approach to the Headquarters of the ICRC in Geneva, the outcome of which will be known by the time the Sub-Committee meets; and the Uruguayans, through HM Ambassador at Montevideo, have pressed us to respond positively to the Destefanis proposal (Montevideo telegram no. 167). A key consideration in the whole problem is the need not to upset the arrangements we have made with Uruguay for the visit of our own next-of-kin who are due to arrive in Montevideo on 4th April.

3. The Attorney General has been invited to the meeting. The Home Secretary is unable to attend.

HANDLING

4. You might open the discussion by asking the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to report any developments over the weekend; and to advise on the Civil Commissioner's contention that it is for the Falkland Islands Government rather than the British Government to give authority for the proposed Argentine visit. You might then ask the Defence Secretary if there are any problems from his point of view about allowing an Argentine ship to visit the Falklands. At the discussion on 24th March he mentioned the risk of the Argentines using the ship as a Trojan horse: is there a risk of the Argentines mounting a raid of some sort at the time of the anniversary of the invasion to coincide with the next-of-kin visit?

5. The main points for decision are -

- a. In the light of the information received from the ICRS and the Uruguayan authorities, should the Destefanis visit be allowed to go ahead?
- b. If so, how can the Falkland Islands Government be brought to acquiesce in it? (One possibility might be for you to send a personal message to the members of the Executive Council).
- c. What should be the terms and timing of a public statement announcing our decision?
- d. If the Destefanis visit goes ahead how can Argentine opportunities for subversion and propaganda be minimised? Should we insist on excluding any press representatives? How will any conditions which we seek to impose affect the conditions for our own next-of-kin visit?
- e. What physical arrangements should be made for the Destefanis group's reception? Should the ship be directed to Darwin and the group transported to the Argentine cemetery and back under escort, thus ensuring that they spend as short a time as possible on Falkland Islands soil?
- f. What further action is needed vis-a-vis the ICRC and the Uruguayan authorities?

CONCLUSION

6. In the light of the decisions taken you will wish to invite the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to take the necessary follow up action with the Civil Commissioner, the ICRC and the Uruguayan authorities; and the Defence Secretary to issue appropriate instructions to the Military Commissioner. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary might also be invited to advise on the terms of the proposed public statement.

David Goodall

25th March 1983

A D S GOODALL

Prime Minister

See also new F.C.O. letter attached.

*A.D.C. 25.
3*

FALKLAND ISLANDS GENERAL (ADVANCES)

39

IMMEDIATE

PS
PS/MR HURD
PS/MR ONSLOW
PS/MR RIFKIND
PS/PUS
SIR J BULLARD
SIR I SINCLAIR
MR GIFFARD
MR WRIGHT
MR ADAMS
LORD N G LENNOX
MR EVANS
MR URE
MR GILLMORE

PS/NO 10 DOWNING ST (3)

PS/S OF S FOR DEFENCE
MR J STEWART AUSD STAFF MOD

PS/CHANCELLOR)
MR ILETT) TREASURY
MR LITTLER)

SIR R ARMSTRONG)
MR A D S GOODALL) CABINET OFFICE
DIO)

MR M A PATTISON, FID, ODA

MR A TITCHENER)
~~MR C H ROBERTS~~, IAT) DOT
MR A FORTNAM

HD/PUSD (2)
HD/SAMD
HD/FID
HD/DEFENCE DEPT
HD/NEWS DEPT
HD/ERD
HD/ECD(E)
HD/UND
HD/PLANNING STAFF

RESIDENT CLERK

O 242150Z MAR 83
FM CIVIL COMMISSIONER
TO FCO LONDON
BT

IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L
S I C E I A

YOUR TELNO PERSONAL 22: ARGENTINE NEXT OF KIN
1 YOUR TUR ARRIVED TOWARDS THE END OF EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEETING
AND COUNCILLORS WISHED ME TO EMPHASISE TO YOU THAT THEY FULLY
UNDERSTAND THE WIDER CONSIDERATIONS THAT ARE CAUSING YOU SUCH
DIFFICULTIES IN REACHING A DECISION ABOUT ARGENTINE NEXT-OF-KIN
VISIT

2 THEIR IMMEDIATE REACTION TO YOUR PROPOSED PUBLIC STATEMENT
WAS ONE OF TOTAL OPPOSITION BUT, AFTER LENGTHY DISCUSSION, THEY
INSTRUCTED ME TO SAY THAT THEY WOULD AGREE TO ACCEPT A VISIT BY
ARGENTINE NEXT OF KIN ON THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS:

- A ARGENTINA MUST FIRST DECLARE A FORMAL CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES
- B NEXT OF KIN MUST TRAVEL WITH VALID VISAS ISSUED BY FIG
- C NEXT OF KIN MUST BE CLOSE RELATIVES OF NAMED DEAD IN DARWIN
CEMETERY

PAGE 2 RBVBAA 240 C O N F I D E N T I A L

3 I PRESUME THAT THESE CONDITIONS WILL BE TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE
TO ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT, WHO WILL DENY ALL RESPONSIBILITY FOR AN
UNOFFICIAL INITIATIVE

PAGE 2 RBVBAA 240 C O N F I D E N T I A L

3 I PRESUME THAT THESE CONDITIONS WILL BE TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE TO ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT, WHO WILL DENY ALL RESPONSIBILITY FOR AN UNOFFICIAL INITIATIVE

4 IF, IN SPITE OF COUNCILLORS VIEWS, YOU DECIDE TO GO AHEAD WITH A PUBLIC STATEMENT AS PROPOSED, I SHALL HAVE TO ADVISE THAT A MILITARY GUARD BE PUT ON THE ARGENTINE CEMETERY AT DARWIN AND THAT A MILITARY ESCORT BE PROVIDED TO PROTECT ARGENTINE NEXT-OF-KIN VISITING CEMETERY FROM SAFE ANCHORAGE. I CANNOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT ISLANDERS WILL TAKE THE LAW INTO THEIR OWN HANDS

5 YOUR PROPOSED PUBLIC STATEMENT COULD ALSO CAUSE LEGAL DIFFICULTIES AS IT IS NOT FOR HMG TO ACCEPT OR REFUSE A VISIT BY ARGENTINE NEXT-OF-KIN TO THE FALKLAND ISLANDS, IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE FIG

HUNT

BT

NNNN

GRS 400

CONFIDENTIAL

Read in full.

CONFIDENTIAL

FM MONTEVIDEO 241650Z MAR 83

TO FLASH FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 167 OF 24 MARCH

INFO PRIORITY UKMIS GENEVA

*(This is to be disseminated
at OJ(ER) on Sunday.)*

*RR 25.
3*

MY TELEGRAM NO 166: ARGENTINE NEXT OF KIN.

1. DIRECTOR OF EXTERNAL POLITICAL AFFAIRS CALLED ME IN AT VERY SHORT NOTICE AN HOUR AGO TO INFORM ME THAT THE URUGUAYAN GOVERNMENT HAD RECEIVED A REQUEST FOR HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT FROM A PRIVATE ARGENTINE ORGANIZATION. HE THEN GAVE ME A COPY OF DESTEFANIS' LETTER WHICH HAD BEEN HANDED IN PERSONALLY TO THE URUGUAYAN EMBASSY IN BUENOS AIRES ON SEVEN MARCH. (PLEASE SEE MY IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING TELEGRAM). UNFORTUNATELY IT HAD BEEN HANDLED IN A VERY ROUTINE WAY BOTH BY THE EMBASSY AND WITHIN THE LOWER REACHES OF THE MFA.
2. AMBASSADOR BERTHET SAID THAT THE URUGUAYAN GOVERNMENT VERY MUCH WANTED TO REPLY CONSTRUCTIVELY IN THE SAME WAY AS THEY HAD TO THE BRITISH NEXT OF KIN VISIT. HOWEVER THEY FIRST WOULD LIKE HMG'S REACTIONS. THE URUGUAYAN GOVERNMENT STRONGLY HOPED THAT THESE WOULD BE POSITIVE AS THIS QUOTE WOULD HELP THE BRITISH NEXT OF KIN VISIT UNQUOTE. TIME WAS SHORT AND HE HOPED THAT I WOULD HAVE A REPLY FOR HIM BY TOMORROW. I SAID THAT THIS MIGHT PROVE DIFFICULT. HE THEN AGAIN URGED THE NECESSITY FOR SPEED AND A POSITIVE REPLY.
3. IN SUBSEQUENT CONVERSATION THE FOLLOWING POINTS EMERGED:
 - (A) THE URUGUAYANS KNOW LITTLE ABOUT DESTEFANIS OR THE CENTRE OF VOLUNTEERS FOR THE FATHERLAND.
 - (B) THE URUGUAYANS HAVE NOT RECEIVED ANY OFFICIAL COMMUNICATION FROM THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT.
 - (C) THE URUGUAYANS BELIEVE THAT REGARDLESS OF WHETHER DESTEFANIS AND HIS GROUP HAVE OFFICIAL SUPPORT, THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT WILL EXPECT A HELPFUL REPLY FROM URUGUAY.
4. WHEN I POINTED TO THE LACK OF PRACTICAL LOGISTIC DETAIL IN THE LETTER, AMBASSADOR BERTHET SAID HE WAS WELL AWARE OF THIS. HOWEVER PRACTICALITIES COULD BE SORTED OUT LATER. WHAT WAS URGENT WAS THAT THE URUGUAYANS SHOULD BE ABLE TO SEND A HELPFUL REPLY BEFORE THE BRITISH NEXT OF KIN VISIT. WHEN I MENTIONED ICRC INVOLVEMENT HE EXPRESSED INTEREST BUT ADDED THAT URUGUAY WOULD WISH IN ACCORDANCE WITH HER HUMANITARIAN TRADITION TO BE HELPFUL TOWARDS A GROUP WHICH WISHED TO PAY RESPECTS TO THEIR DEAD. HE HOPED THE BRITISH WOULD ALSO RECOGNISE THE HUMANITARIAN POINT. SURELY WE HAD NOTHING TO LOSE AND MUCH TO GAIN IN AGREEING TO THE VISIT.
5. THE SITUATION WHICH HAS ARISEN IS THE ONE WE FEARED. (MY TELEGRAM NO 105.) TIME IS INDEED SHORT WITH THE HOLY WEEK HOLIDAYS HERE AND IN ARGENTINA, AND THE CUNARD COUNTESS ARRIVING ON 4 APRIL.

CONFIDENTIAL

16.

CONFIDENTIAL

6. I STILL CANNOT BE CERTAIN WHETHER URUGUAY WOULD CALL OFF THE BRITISH NEXT OF KIN VISIT IF WE DO NOT PRODUCE POSITIVE REACTIONS. HOWEVER THE DANGER DOES NOW EXIST.

HUTCHINSON

[COPIES SENT TO NO 10 DOWNING STREET]

FAKLAND ISLANDS GENERAL

FCO

FID

CABINET OFFICE

ADDITIONAL DISTRIBUTION

FAKLAND ISLANDS

-2-

CONFIDENTIAL

HL

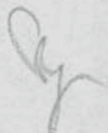
9 March 1983

Possible visit by Argentine next-of-kin

The Prime Minister has noted the contents of your letter of 7 March.

JOHN COLES

John Holmes, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.





Prime Minister

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

This could become a very awkward issue - and could come up in the House at any time.

7 March, 1983

MS

*A. & C. 1/3
cc. Sir A. Parsons.*

MS

Dear John,

Possible Visit by Argentine Next-of-Kin

You asked for an account of the current position following recent telegrams and press reports, and advice on the line the Prime Minister might take in Parliament. The situation is not yet sufficiently clear for firm policy recommendations. Argentine intentions are obscure and careful thought is needed to ensure that our response to whatever is eventually proposed meets our interests.

The Argentine group now trying to set up a visit to the Falklands call themselves the 'Centre for Volunteers for the Fatherland'; they are described in the Argentine press as 'a group of ex-combatants of the Falklands War', though they also invite parents, wives and other relatives of Argentine servicemen buried in the Falklands to make contact with their head office. Again according to the press, they are 'requesting permission to return to the Islands' with the 'cooperation of the ICRC and the protection of the United Nations'. Their representative, Destefanis, has been in contact with the Argentine office of the ICRC, and has asked them to convey to us information about his proposed expedition. He said that it was humanitarian and non-political and that he intended to hire a boat and set sail from Montevideo (earlier reports said the ship would have a capacity of 60 at most and that the group intended the visit to take place in about 45 days' time ie at exactly the same time as our own next of kin visit). He denied any official links and told the ICRC that he had not informed the Argentine authorities of his plans. However we know that the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs have been enquiring about Destefanis' plans and that the Argentine Joint Chiefs of Staff are setting up a commission to deal with all those who wish to visit war graves in the Falklands. Destefanis has also been in direct contact with BISBA, two weeks ago, although he did not mention his intention to visit the islands. We know little of Destefanis,

*220.
106*

*Passage deleted and closed, 40 years, under FOI Exemption.
Wayland, 12 February 2013*

It is difficult to be sure from this what we are faced with. We certainly cannot exclude the participation of retired or serving military personnel, whose motives may be far from humanitarian. The 'Centre for Volunteers for the Fatherland' hardly inspire confidence as organisers. But it is not inconceivable that in the end the Argentines will propose a carefully-prepared group consisting of bona fide next-of-kin (though it would not be easy



to check). We might face an attempt to travel from Argentina to the Falklands in an Argentine vessel without requesting permission (they would automatically be turned back at the edge of the 150-mile FIPZ) or an independent group in an Argentine vessel might apply for permission. Equally, we might have to respond to a request for a visit by a group officially sponsored by the ICRC or conceivably by the Uruguayan Government.

In all this, we must take careful account of Islander opinion. Sir R Hunt's initial assessment is, not surprisingly, that the Islanders would be totally and unanimously opposed to an Argentine visit to Darwin in any circumstances. There would be strong public feelings here also, depending on what exactly is proposed. It is difficult to imagine circumstances in which an Argentine visit would seem appropriate for the foreseeable future, given the present Argentine attitude and bellicose statements.

On the other side, we must bear in mind the potential dangers to our own next-of-kin visit. The hyper-sensitive attitude of the Uruguayans has for some time been causing us concern, and the proposal's 45-day timing suggests that it could be a carefully-contrived ploy by Buenos Aires to embarrass the Uruguayans by putting them under pressure to be as helpful to Argentine next-of-kin as they are to British. The Ambassador in Montevideo advises that, unless we make an offer to accept a properly-organised Argentine next-of-kin visit, the Argentines are likely to use our attitude as a weapon to persuade the Uruguayans to withdraw their agreement to our visit. We must obviously guard against this.

As far as international opinion more generally is concerned, our treatment of the Argentine dead on the Falklands has shown up the Argentine Government's callous disregard for the norms of civilised behaviour. And we should be able to use this to good effect if we turn down an Argentine request. However, although the Geneva Conventions do not oblige us to permit a visit, we could forfeit some of our earlier credit if we seemed to be responding inflexibly to a genuine humanitarian proposal.

If Mrs Thatcher is asked about this while the position remains unclear, she could draw on the following:

(a) The Argentines have from the first treated their war dead with callous disregard. Before arranging for the reburial of the Argentine dead in the Islands in February, we repeatedly offered to return the bodies to Argentina if the Argentine Government so wished. This offer is still open.

(b) Any group of Argentines now wishing to visit the Falklands would have to have our permission. No request for permission has been received. If they try to enter the Protection Zone without, they will be dealt with appropriately.



(c) We are not impressed by what we read in press reports of the proposed composition of the Argentine group. A visit at the initiative of 'ex-combatants' is in no way comparable with our own next-of-kin visit.

(d) A request for a visit from a group with genuine humanitarian motives would be given careful consideration, but the Geneva Conventions do not oblige us to grant any Argentines permission to visit the cemetery at Darwin. We would obviously have to take into account also the Argentine refusal to declare a cessation of hostilities or begin to normalise relations.

Mr Pym has not seen this letter before its despatch, but I am submitting to him in parallel tonight. I am sending copies to Richard Mottram (MOD) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office)

Your ever

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'John E. Holmes'.

(J E Holmes)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
Private Secretary
No 10