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FM LISBON 201652Z DEC 83

TO PRIORITY FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 245 OF 20 DECEMBER 1983

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YOUR TELNO 147: ARGENTINA-PORTUGAL

1. I SAW PORTUGUESE PRIME MINISTER ON 19 DECEMBER.
2. SOARES SAID HE HAD ASKED TO SEE ME BECAUSE HE HAD SPOKEN TO THE PRESS ABOUT HIS VISIT TO BUENOS AIRES AND HAD MENTIONED PRESIDENT ALFONSIN'S WISH FOR BETTER RELATIONS WITH BRITAIN. HE WANTED TO GIVE ME HIS IMPRESSIONS.
3. ALFONSIN HAD STRUCK HIM AS LIKE A EUROPEAN LIBERAL - 'RATHER LIKE HELMUT SCHMIDT'. HE HAD ALREADY TAKEN SOME ACTION AGAINST THE MILITARY, DISMISSING 57 GENERALS AND SPEAKING AGAINST MILITARY VENTURES BY WHICH HE HAD MEANT THE FALKLANDS INVASION. HE WOULD HAVE REAL DIFFICULTIES WITH THE PERONISTS AND LABOUR ORGANISATIONS BUT SOARES BELIEVED THERE WAS A PROSPECT THAT DEMOCRACY COULD BE RESTORED IN ARGENTINA AND HAD RETURNED CONVINCED THAT IT WAS IN THE INTERESTS OF EUROPE AND THE WEST THAT ALFONSIN SHOULD SUCCEED.
4. DURING MEETINGS IN BUENOS AIRES SOARES HAD STRESSED PORTUGAL'S ALLIANCE WITH BRITAIN AND IMPORTANCE HE PERSONALLY ATTACHED TO HIS RELATIONS WITH BRITAIN WHOSE PRIME MINISTER HE HAD INVITED TO VISIT PORTUGAL SOON. AT A SUBSEQUENT PRIVATE MEETING ALFONSIN HAD REVERTED TO THIS AND ASKED HIM IF HE WOULD DO WHAT HE COULD TO CONVINCING THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT OF HIS WISH FOR BETTER RELATIONS. SOARES SAID HE FELT IT HIS DUTY TO TRANSMIT THIS MESSAGE. HE BELIEVED THAT AT HEART DEMOCRATIC POLITICIANS IN ARGENTINA KNEW QUITE WELL THAT BUT FOR MRS THATCHER'S RESPONSE TO THE FALKLANDS INVASION THEY WOULD NOT HAVE GOT THEIR PRESENT OPPORTUNITY. BRITAIN (AND THEREFORE EUROPE) WAS STILL UNPOPULAR IN SOUTH AMERICA BUT THERE WAS AN OPPORTUNITY TO RESUME A HEALTHFUL DEMOCRATIC INFLUENCE.
5. I ASKED IF ALFONSIN HAD TAKEN THE INITIATIVE. SOARES SAID THAT SEQUENCE HAD BEEN AS DESCRIBED ABOVE. ALFONSIN HAD RAISED QUESTION OF IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH HMG AS SOON AS HE HAD RECEIVED SOARES IN PRIVATE.
6. I THANKED SOARES FOR HIS ACCOUNT AND UNDERTOOK TO REPORT. I THEN SPOKE ON LINES OF GUIDANCE TELNO 166 (PARAGRAPH 4). MEMORIES OF THE CONFLICT FORCED UPON US LAST YEAR WERE STILL FRESH AND CONFIDENCE HAD TO BE REBUILT STEP BY STEP. I FELT SURE THERE WOULD BE GRATITUDE IN LONDON FOR SOARES'S INTEREST AND THAT THIS WOULD BE BORNE IN MIND. WE WERE NOW PURSUING DEVELOPMENTS THROUGH OUR OWN CHANNELS.

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7. IN A SUBSEQUENT CONVERSATION WITH SOARES'S DIPLOMATIC ADVISER, WHO HAD BEEN PRESENT, HE TOLD ME HE THOUGHT SOARES HAD BEEN GLAD OF THIS OPPORTUNITY TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF HIS CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT ALFONSIN. HE WOULD NOT EXPECT ANY IMMEDIATE RESPONSE BUT MIGHT REVERT TO THE MATTER DURING THE PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO LISBON.

8. SEE ALSO MIFT.

BYATT

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