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Dear Robert

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FALKLANDS AND AFTER: LATIN AMERICAN ATTITUDES

1. With the Falklands conflict still raging it is pointless to predict the range and depth of reactions throughout Latin America; these depend on what is still to happen, over how long a period it happens, what shape Argentina is left in after it has happened, and whether a settlement is then feasible. Nor can Brazil speak for Latin America, being in it, but not wholly of it. However, the Luso-American attitude to the situation contrasts with and illuminates the Hispano-American emotionalism which in varying degrees afflicts the rest of this continent at present.

2. The Brazilian Government is first of all in favour of peace in the region. Only after that does it display an impartiality-tilted-in-favour-of-Argentina. The two positions are inherently incompatible, but straddling contradictions and sitting on fences is a Brazilian characteristic and the iron has not yet entered into their soul as a result. The pro-Argentine tilt is a gesture to Latin American solidarity, and more important, a manifestation of neighbourly prudence, rather than a sign of affection for the dangerous lunatics down south. The Government position is sharply criticised by some of the most weighty Brazilian newspapers, Jornal do Brasil and Estado do São Paulo whose trenchant pro-British editorials we have been sending back to the department. Brazil therefore is different, and if not forced by the gravity of events into choices she would much prefer to avoid (but where the facts of geography will outweigh logic or principle), should remain an influence for sanity and restraint in Latin America.

3. After less than a month here it may seem premature for me to offer judgements on Brazil much less on "Latin America". However, I plead a "Havana angle", having just come from Castro's kingdom and also one earlier experience which suggests certain parallels. I was in Greece in the summer of 1974 when the leader of that Junta (Brigadier Ioannides, remember him? Few do)



who had the previous winter elbowed aside the less hard-line Col Panadopoulos, but then found himself at a loss what to do in the face of mounting popular hostility - decided to stake everything on one bold gamble to achieve an age-old nationalist aspiration which he hoped would unite the Greek populace behind him. And so he launched the coup in Cyprus against Makarios, with the unstated aim of enslaving for that (mostly) Hellenic outpost with the Motherland.

4. When Turkey predictably responded by invading the island, Karamanlis claimed to have been grossly misled by the Americans, and was removed to the trashcan of history. Happily for Greece, there was a Karamanlis on hand to take over. Unhappily for Cyprus, the consequences are still with the people, as Javier Perez de Cuellar well knows, having spent some two years on the island binding the wounds. Mutatis the necessary mutandis he too must have a strong feeling today of deja vu.

5. So also, seeing their policy for a whole region made suddenly fragile, must the United States. Even Brazil felt bound to condemn publicly the dramatic US switch against Argentina. Guerreiro told the Senate that the Inter-American system would never again be the same. To emphasize Brazil's disapproval, President Figueiredo cut short by one symbolic day his long-planned official visit to Washington in the second week of May. This, if ever, was the time for the stolid responsible leader of the largest Latin American power to confer with Reagan and Haig, yet leaks in the press here just before the visit claimed that Figueiredo was under strong pressure from senior advisers to cancel the trip, to underline the "deep disquiet" of the Brazilian military establishment. (In typically Brazilian manner, the visit went ahead, as was sensible, while the leaks provided a bit of theatre to appease the Argentines, who opposed the visit).

6. The episode underlined the ambivalence of the Brazilian position. In strict logic, the Brazilian military establishment has good reason to welcome our bashing the Argentines about a bit, and so dampening their enthusiasm for military adventure. Our service attachés here get frequent surreptitious encouragement in this sense from their contacts. This does not however prevent the higher echelons from trying to buy Argentine goodwill by selling them hardware; so far two Bahdeirante maritime reconnaissance aircraft and unspecified munitions.

7. In a real sense, by defending its Falklanders, Britain is fighting the cause of all Argentina's neighbours. Whether or not the Argentine plan for expansion (Operation Rosario - sent to ECO last week) denounced in the Brazilian mass-circulation magazine Manchete is authentic, there must be real fear among her neighbours that the Argentine Junta's knee-jerk response every time domestic inflation and political frustration rates pass danger mark "X", might be cross-frontier aggression.



8. However, we are clearly not being thanked for our action, and not just because the neighbours feel a need to appease Argentina. Certainly there are differing degrees of anti-British vehemence in Latin America at present; as a Brazilian commentator has pointed out, it is most extreme in those countries which do not share a common frontier with Argentina. There are of course individual interests to be discounted; Venezuela shilly-shallying on the brink of aggression against Guyana. There is caste solidarity between Latin American military. However, irrespective of the obvious motivations above, I think there are a number of factors generally present in Latin America which we should try to analyse and take into account for the future.

9. Because of its reaction to the Falkland crisis, Britain has shattered a number of the illusions behind which Latin America had sheltered since the end of World War Two. Britain has in fact brought the region back into sharp contact with the outside world. We are blamed less for what we have done to Argentina, than for what we have done to the USA and caused the USA to do to Latin America. Thus, the crisis has revealed that for Washington when the chips are down:

- a. OAS is worth less than NATO;
- b. Latin is worth less than Anglo-Saxon.

Consequently, Latin American countries must digest the facts that:

- c. in certain circumstances the American hemispheric shield is inoperative;
- d. (most alarming of all) US arm-twisting power was not enough to halt Argentina's gamble. The prospect opens up of a free-for-all across disputed frontiers all over the continent;
- e. furthermore when Havana is seen to endorse a Monroe Doctrine which the United States has reneged upon we are also blamed for the unspecified opportunities thought to be opening up for the Soviet Union, either directly or via its Cuban local agent.

10. None of the above may look surprising to the outsider, but the irrationality of the destroyed myth is little consolation to those who cherished it. The American cocoon was a comfortable one. Thanks to it, Brazil for instance was able to maintain low per capita expenditure on armaments while concentrating on development. It could even afford the luxury of a "Third World" policy, inspired by the trendier members of the Itamaraty. The Navy Minister is now speaking however of greatly increased outlay



on the fleet, and the Air Minister warns that "traditional alliances" are worth nothing. The fact that Inter-American solidarity at least between Anglo-Saxon North and Latin South is for the moment in obedience, may explain why the Latin American solidarity remnant is now being played up for more than it is worth.

11. The feeling is that no matter how monstrously the Argentines may behave, the non-communist Latin American regimes are all in the same boat, and deserve United States support. They are in varying degrees clients enjoying the advantages and disadvantages of US regional hegemony. In the East-West war, they are Washington's allies, and should qualify for American support simply because of what they are, irrespective of what they do. (The Carter period is regarded as an aberration fortunately left behind.) Thus, if the dynamic of the anti-communist struggle makes it necessary for the Argentine Junta to "disappear" the Falkland Islands just as it has had to "disappear" large numbers of its own citizens, Washington is expected to acquiesce in both. The enclosed cartoon by Ziraldo in Jornal do Brasil pinpoints this underlying truth. Says the first character: "The British military have killed over five hundred Argentines already." Says the second: "Help! If this war goes on, the British military will end up killing more Argentines than the Argentine military ..."

12. Looking at the situation through the eyes of Havana, one can see the Falklands crisis as a function of the El Salvador war. Whether or not American military advisers left their Argentine collaborators in that undertaking with the impression that a grab at the Falklands would not bring dire consequences, left-wing propaganda after the event is already ensuring that American encouragement and then betrayal is written into the myth. Again, through Havana's eyes, the crisis is an inevitable development. As champion of the West in Latin America, victor in its own social war, and under Galtieri ready to export its recipe to crisis areas in Central America, Argentina came to overvalue its importance to and leverage with Washington, while its grain and meat sales to the Soviet Union gave it confidence in the protection of its home front from active left-wing subversion. Ignorant of democracy, it neglected the importance of the American media in bringing public opinion to bear on Congress, and thus on a (possibly) reluctant Administration. For the media, what Argentina did was more important than what it professed itself to be. His methods were what cost Batista American support in 1958, no doubt to the despair of realpolitikers in Washington even then.

13. The Latin American military junta is the extreme expression of an embattled bourgeois elite. It is the sword which takes over from the hand, and in the Argentine case, also from the brain. It can impose a solution of a kind, and for a time, at



high cost in blood. But inherently, it cannot solve underlying social and economic problems and increasingly baffled, seeks desperate solutions. It is also mortified by its unpopularity and the lack of gratitude of the people whom it has saved from communism. It yearns for what Andrew Whitley of the FT, who passed through Brasilia recently on his way back from Buenos Aires, described as "clean medals" to be earned (together with public, and indeed self-esteem) by achieving glorious victories and spilling other nations' blood. This might allow the military to bow out in good order, secure from prosecution for the Argentine blood they had shed, or if they wished to remain in power, to do so with fervent nationalist support across the political spectrum. (Conscious perhaps that the Argentine crowd idolises its football teams when they win, but tears them to pieces if they lose, the opposition political forces appear to have separated out their support for the concept of Malvinas reconquest, from their continued opposition to the Junta.) If laundering their medals was what the Argentine military sought, all they have achieved is the spectacle of Lt Cdr Astiz on South Georgia in the full glare of world attention, showing that clean medals are not so easy to earn at the expense of British marine commandos, as dirty ones at the expense of Swedish teenage girls and French nuns.

14. If, on the other hand, the Junta suffers defeat and collapses, there is a good chance of a populist regime coming to power, strongly influenced by the left-wing. If the Falklands problem remains unsolved, it can be used as a permanent stimulus to anti-American sentiment, with Latin American solidarity made obligatory on this issue much as Arab solidarity is obligatory on the Palestinian issue. The Falklands dispute can in this way be the fulcrum for the levering of Latin America out of the American orbit.

15. If however the Junta survives, and avoids the plunge into entanglement with the Soviets (grain and meat for arms), there is still potential advantage for Havana, indeed more mileage to be gained from Galtieri and his successors than was ever gained from Che Guevara, to name another celebrated Argentine. With American hegemony depreciated, frontier disputes can be warmed up. The victor may find that guerrillas of his own opposition come to nest across the borders where a humiliated right-wing regime has been succeeded by one of different cast. Rearmament to meet regional threats means less resource devoted to social investment, and greater trouble stored long-term. If the nationalistic and aggressive military caste antagonise the United States definitively, they are simply cutting themselves off from the North American imperialism which is the main support of both themselves and the bourgeois elite they represent.

16. Such are the openings Havana might try to exploit. Reality will no doubt depart from the schema drawn up by Marxist analysis, just as US domino theorists at the time of Vietnam failed to anticipate that the largest domino of all, China, would fall the other way. Nonetheless, if it whips up Latin Americanist



fervour sufficiently, Cuba should obtain some gains from the conflict.

17. We may not find it palatable, but the fact remains that there are two Falklands conflicts in progress. The first, to our and most European and North American eyes, is straightforward. A large, rich, murderous right-wing military regime, with the flimsiest of historical excuses, launched an unprovoked attack on a small, poor peaceful southern islands belonging to Britain. In the process, it imposed alien, essentially colonialist rule on people whose inherent right to self-determination was thus frustrated.

18. The second conflict is that of the Malvinas, where a Latin American, Southern, Third World people are attempting to right historical injustice and liberate their territory from imperialist control in the face of gunboat diplomacy, economic sanctions by the industrialised major powers and deployment of the banking weapon. This may strike us as a bizarre description of beef-eating Hispano-Italian colonialists. It is even more bizarre when they attempt to turn the Rio Treaty on its head and convert it into a mugger's charter. But I repeat, for most of Latin America, what their fellow nations are is the significant thing, not what they do.

19. The crisis is thus regarded in double-focus, with astigmatic vision. On 2 April, the Falklands conflict was the image which emerged clear to most. But as the fighting continued, and the Belcrano was sunk, so the second image, that of the Malvinas, came into sharper focus. At a briefing here of Commonwealth heads of mission last week, the Guyanese Ambassador, whose country has the greatest interest in the discouragement of territorial adventure by the more powerful and irresponsible Latin American states, hoped profoundly that whatever we had to do, we would do quickly and conclusively. He was greatly concerned at the prospect of a long drawn-out dispute, which would stimulate Latin American sentiment not only against Britain, but against the successor states to the British Empire, notably to the Anglophone Caribbean. The Ambassador of Trinidad, whose island is also subject to Venezuelan threat of a kind, concurred. If the dispute is not to have hemispheric repercussions of an enduring and negative kind, swift military success is required from us, followed if at all possible, by magnanimous settlement.

Yours sincerely
M Perceval

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