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FALKLAND ISLANDS

21 July, 1982

THE FALKLANDS CRISIS—AS SEEN FROM MONTEVIDEO

*Her Majesty's Ambassador at Montevideo to the
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs*

SUMMARY

Uruguay's rôle in the humanitarian operations to repatriate casualties and POWs was established by the repatriation of the Governor and his party (paragraph 1).

2. Uruguay chose a policy of maintaining equidistance between the belligerents, and although this proved impossible, gave no overt material assistance to Argentina and was consistently helpful over humanitarian matters (paragraphs 2-5).

3. Uruguay was hostile to European Community sanctions and she will face increasing economic problems as Argentina is a major trading and investment partner. She will probably feel obliged to support Argentina in any diplomatic campaign but she desperately wants—and needs—a permanent settlement in the South Atlantic (paragraphs 6 and 7).

4. Despite good working relations with the Uruguayans, there were occasional flurries (paragraph 8).

5. Other ways in which the crisis affected this Embassy: dealings with the ICRC and movements of staff (paragraphs 9 and 10).

6. A tribute to the hard work and efficiency of the Uruguayans. The importance of British/Uruguayan co-operation on humanitarian questions for general relations and the position of the Embassy (paragraph 11).

(Confidential)

Sir,

Montevideo,

21 July, 1982

The view from Montevideo of the Falkland Islands crisis was somewhat special, partly because of Uruguay's geographical position and special links with Argentina and also because of Uruguay's tradition of assistance over humanitarian matters. Looking back over the main events since Argentina's invasion on 2 April as summarised in the enclosed calendar, the crucial dates for us were 2 and 8 April, even if their significance was by no means evident at the time. On the evening of 2 April I was summoned by the Foreign Minister to be told that, subject to the concurrence of Her Majesty's Government, Uruguay was

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prepared to accept that night an Argentine military aircraft carrying the Governor of the Falklands, his family and the Marines who had been captured at Port Stanley, with a view to facilitating their return to the UK. In order to enable me to obtain a swift reply, the Ministry's direct dialling facilities were put at my disposal. Surely one of the few occasions on which a Head of Mission has sought instructions from the premises of the MFA of the host country? When I received the go-ahead, the Minister asked me to do everything in my power to prevent the media interviewing the Governor or any of the Marines during their stay in Uruguay. I provided the required assurances. The Governor and his party duly arrived, hours late, part of the delay being due to the Argentines' belated wish to keep the Governor. Only the personal intervention of the Uruguayan Foreign Minister with Buenos Aires ensured that the Governor did in fact arrive in Montevideo. A day later, he and his party were collected by an RAF VC 10, which flew them to the UK. What proved to be the first of a series of humanitarian operations went well, apart from the physical and telephonic siege to which my Residence, the Chancery and members of my then small staff were subjected by representatives of the world media, who wanted to talk to the Governor, or to anyone else from the Falklands for that matter. This Embassy became extremely unpopular with the world media and especially the British press. This temporary unpopularity however was well worth while as the Uruguayan Government, having seen that we were prepared to go to some lengths to prevent any interviews that might prove embarrassing to Uruguay's relations with Argentina, were encouraged to follow their humanitarian traditions and to allow Montevideo to become a transit point for Falkland Islanders leaving the Islands, the Marines captured in South Georgia, Argentine POWs and the hospital ships *Hecla*, *Hydra* and *Herald* who carried our casualties from *Uganda* to Montevideo for onward flights to the UK by RAF VC 10 hospital planes. As will be seen from the statistics in Annex II from 2 April until 12 July, 121 Marines from the Falkland Islands and South Georgia were sent home to the UK via Montevideo and 555 British casualties. To Argentina were repatriated 1,181 Argentine POWs, including a few casualties.

2. 8 April was significant when under cover of a formal note the Foreign Minister handed me a copy of the Uruguayan Council for National Security Communiqué laying down Uruguay's policy of equidistance between the two belligerents and a ban on any Uruguayan organisation or individual taking action which would be of military help to either side. This effectively put paid to any lingering hopes of our using the Port of Montevideo for refuelling or supplying vessels of the Task Force. However, we were at least clear as to the parameters within which we had to operate.

3. In practice it was impossible for Uruguay to remain equidistant. For many years she had supported Argentina's claim to sovereignty over the Islands and while she deplored Argentina's use of force on 2 April, she equally deplored the despatch of the Task Force. Uruguay therefore inevitably supported Argentina in the two meetings of the Treaty of the River Plate held on 27 April and 27 May for which the Uruguayan Foreign Minister was in the chair. However, while it is very possible that Uruguay or Uruguayans helped Argentina or Argentines in under the counter ways, Uruguay made no effort, unlike Peru or Venezuela, to provide overt material assistance to Argentina.

4. Amongst all the Latin-American countries, small Uruguay was probably in the most difficult position. Uruguay today might well be a province of Argentina had it not been for the centralising theories of the early fighters for Argentina's Independence. While our contribution to Uruguay's independence

and development is still recognised, the links between families, industry and commerce, and indeed the Armed Forces on either side of the River Plate are necessarily very close. Also there is—or was—much Argentine capital invested in Uruguay. Thus, while many Uruguayans regard the Argentines as brash and immoderate, they also realise very clearly the dangers of offending Argentina. In the early weeks of the crisis Uruguay was bombarded by Argentine propaganda, via radio, television and the press. Initially it seemed that our only friends were the editors of the thoughtful weeklies, apart from those private individuals who wrote or telephoned to offer support or solidarity. We had little in the way of material or indeed manpower to counter Argentine misinformation. While with the limited resources available we did what we could to get over the main points of our case, we were also conscious of the importance of maintaining a calm stance given the humanitarian help we were likely to require from Uruguay. Fortunately some Argentine activities were counter-productive, particularly those of the Argentine Ambassador who was felt by some Uruguayans at least to be behaving as if he were in Argentina. Furthermore, many Uruguayans were alarmed and horrified by the Hitler-like Galtieri speeches and crowd emotionalism from the Plaza de Mayo shown on their television screens. Finally, we were eventually reinforced on the press side and were able to achieve more with the media. It also gradually emerged that whatever the public statements by the Minister of Foreign Affairs in support of Argentina's claim to sovereignty over the Islands, we had friends in the Ministry and elsewhere in the Uruguayan establishment. These could not overtly support us over the main issue. On the other hand, they could and did help us over the complicated negotiation and organisation for the humanitarian operations.

5. There is little doubt that our work with Uruguayans over humanitarian matters was helpful in maintaining British-Uruguayan relations. We in this Embassy necessarily had daily contact not only with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at all levels, but also with other parts of the Uruguayan Governmental machine. Even at the height of the crisis when the fighting on the Islands became very tough, I and my staff were treated with unfailing friendliness and courtesy to the surprise of certain of my colleagues, notably the European Community Heads of Mission, and I had access in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at whatever level and at whatever time I needed it.

6. The reaction in Uruguay to the European Community sanctions against Argentina was unreservedly hostile. This could hardly have been otherwise given the unpopularity of the Community in Uruguay and the fact that the Uruguayan economy is so closely linked to that of Argentina. The withdrawal of British banks from the Salto Grande loan was portrayed as an example of sanctions against Argentina affecting other South American countries and a report in the Uruguayan press that the Bank of England had declared the whole of Latin America a risk area called for a categorical denial from this Embassy. The Asociacion Latino-americana de Integracion, whose headquarters are in Montevideo, joined in the condemnation of the Community sanctions and subsequently met in June to study possible practical economic measures to assist Argentina. In practical terms, the Falklands crisis has so far not had major effects on the Uruguayan economy, but has caused certain difficulties notably the dearth of shipping with so many vessels avoiding the Port of Buenos Aires and thus not coming to Montevideo. The future is, however, a different matter as the country now faces the prospect of a major trading and investment partner in severe economic difficulty, a 1982/83 tourist season with even fewer Argentine visitors and even more unmanageable Argentine competition in markets of

common interest. If there is to be an optimistic note it can be no more than that the events of the last few months may have led some to look towards Uruguay as a more reliable business partner than Argentina.

7. Hopefully the fighting is now over. Many Uruguayans are not sorry that bombastic Argentina has been cut down to size. Nevertheless they are worried. Uruguay desperately wants and indeed needs a permanent settlement in the South Atlantic. This however has not prevented a reaffirmation of Uruguayan support for Argentina's claim to sovereignty and a statement of Uruguayan non-involvement in the future of the Islands unless the prior concurrence of the Government of Argentina is forthcoming. Perhaps these statements were considered the minimum necessary in the light of the political and economic upheavals on the other side of the River Plate, which could well be dangerous for the current régime in Uruguay. During the crisis there were two occasions when the Uruguayan Foreign Minister apparently thought he might have a rôle to play. On 23 May, when prior to the first Rio Treaty meeting he hoped that Her Majesty's Government would provide him with some message which he could use at the meeting, and on 1 June when, horrified by the potential blood bath in and around Port Stanley, he floated the impractical idea of a private meeting here between him, the Argentine Ambassador and myself. Looking to the future I suspect Uruguay would like to help try to find a solution provided such help would not upset Argentina. Nevertheless Uruguay is likely to find it difficult, if not impossible, to avoid supporting Argentina in whatever diplomatic campaigns the latter may launch even if sensible officials understand the need for a period of reconstruction and reflexion.

8. Inevitably despite our good working relations with the Uruguayans, there was the odd flurry. The most important was in relation to the status of the River Plate and our hope to avoid hostilities within the Estuary. Our Note to the Uruguayans on this matter caused considerable concern because nobody here had envisaged that hostilities might come so near to Uruguay. Furthermore it emerged that Uruguay had never accepted the River Plate to be anything but a river throughout its full course. However Her Majesty's Government's highly diplomatic reply to the stiff Uruguayan Note in response to ours calmed down the Uruguayans, not however before Argentina had made full use of the issue at the UN and elsewhere. The second major *mauvais moment* was when a VC 10 carrying medical supplies for one of the hospital ships inadvertently omitted to off-load some Harrier spares at Ascension Island. This became a *cause célèbre* for 24 hours but eventually the Uruguayan authorities, or most of them, accepted our assurances that they had been left on the aircraft by mistake. For us in this Embassy the most tense of a number of worrying days was when British troops landed on South Georgia. The authorities concerned with our security were also bothered, judging from the massive police reinforcements around the Residence and Chancery, and the alarming armed escort I was given when I went to see the acting Foreign Minister.

9. I should perhaps touch on our dealings with the ICRC. Apart from getting certain ICRC delegates onto our hospital ships, our main direct contact was with the Buenos Aires Regional Office who produced inspectors for medical supplies brought in by the RAF VC 10s for the hospital ships. My impression of the delegates reinforced by what the Captains of the hospital ships told me, was that not only were they inexperienced but were operating against a background of accumulated ICRC lore on land conflicts which was mostly irrelevant to the conflict in the South Atlantic. The shining exception was Monsieur Eberlin, the ICRC maritime expert who won glowing tributes from all quarters.

As seen from here the ICRC was not only legalistic but also unnecessarily bureaucratic. Furthermore, communication between the ICRC in Geneva and the Uruguayan Government on several occasions was dangerously inadequate, as indeed on occasion was communication between Buenos Aires and the Argentine Embassy here. This lack of communication was compounded by the lawyers within the Uruguayan Civil Service who initially at least found it difficult to understand how the implicit understanding between Argentina and the UK for returning prisoners while hostilities were still in progress, related to the Geneva Conventions.

10. This report would be incomplete if I failed to touch on the *va et vient* of staff in this Embassy, to the point that at times I felt I was presiding over a railway station. The closing of the Embassy in Buenos Aires added to our administrative problems in the early days of the crisis and then the initial staff reinforcements from there were, for good reason, soon withdrawn. While we were more than glad to be sent additional help from elsewhere, the number of short-term appointments since the crisis started must have the Uruguayans wondering a little. I am grateful, however, to all those in the Office who understood our staff problems and did their best to solve them. A great load was carried by my hard core pre-2 April staff, particularly those who until we were reinforced, covered communications around the clock and still managed a full day's intensive work.

11. However we must remember that many Uruguayans put in long and unsocial hours at the Port and military airbase, sometimes in appalling weather. They proved to be surprisingly efficient organisers. Co-ordination on the Uruguayan side was kept in the hands of the Services under the close eye of Admiral Laborde, the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee. We learned that the organisation of the transportation for the wounded was being used by the Uruguayan authorities to test and practise their civil emergency plans. Ambassador Rodriguez Nin, the Director of Protocol, was a staunch efficient and helpful adviser at all times. On the numerous occasions on which I expressed appreciation of Uruguayan help, I was told that if fighting had to take place, at least Uruguay could help send the unfortunate wounded and prisoners back to their homes. We must nevertheless remember that had we not been able to work so closely with the Uruguayans on humanitarian matters, our general relations and indeed the position of this Embassy might well have been very different.

12. This despatch is being copied to Her Majesty's Representatives at Asuncion and Santiago, and to the UK Permanent Representatives at New York and Geneva.

I am Sir

Yours faithfully

PATRICIA M. HUTCHINSON.

ANNEX I

Calendar of Main Events

28 March RRS *John Biscoe* sails for Port Stanley with new Marine Garrison (NP 8901).

2 April Argentine invasion of the Falklands.

3 April Governor of the Falkland Islands, Mr. Rex Hunt and family, 92 Royal Marines (NP 8901) and 16 civilians arrive in Montevideo.

4 April Governor and party depart for UK in RAF VC 10.

7 April British Embassy Buenos Aires closed. Defence and Naval Attachés, First Secretary and four support staff arrive in Montevideo.

8 April Uruguayan Council for National Security communiqué calling for a peaceful solution to the Falklands. It made clear Uruguay's wish to remain equidistant as between the two countries and prohibited Uruguayan help to either belligerent.

11 April Four civilians (including two Islanders) evacuated to UK.

14 April 32 civilians from Falkland Islands evacuated to UK by civilian aircraft.

15 April Mrs. Ferguson (ODA) and two children evacuated to UK.

19 April 29 Royal Marines and 13 British Antarctic Survey personnel from occupied South Georgia, depart for UK on RAF VC 10.

21 April 30 civilians (including five Islanders) evacuated to UK by civilian aircraft.

25 April British landing on South Georgia.

27 April Rio Treaty meeting: Washington. Resolution supporting Argentina's claim to Falkland Islands and calling on UK to cease hostilities.

1 May Uruguay condemns British military action and reasserts support for Argentine sovereignty claim over Falkland Islands. (This followed the return of the Foreign Minister from Washington.)

13 May 150 Argentine prisoners captured in South Georgia handed over in Montevideo.

27 May Rio Treaty meeting: Washington. Resolution calls on signatories to assist Argentina.

1 June Foreign Minister suggests private meeting between Argentine and British Ambassadors and himself.

2 June Arrival of HMS *Hecla*: 24 POWs from the Argentine ship *Narwhal* and 18 British casualties. Latter evacuated by RAF VC 10.

6 June HMS *Hydra*: 51 British casualties. RAF VC 10 arrives with five cases of non-medical supplies which are impounded by Uruguayan authorities.

12 June MV *Norland* arrives Montevideo with 1,013 Argentine POWs.

13 June HMS *Herald*: 60 British casualties evacuated by RAF VC 10.

16 June HMS *Hecla*: 61 British casualties evacuated by RAF VC 10.

18 June HMS *Hydra*: 82 British casualties evacuated by RAF VC 10.

24 June HMS *Herald*: 100 British casualties evacuated by two RAF VC 10s.

25 June HMS *Hecla*: 76 British casualties evacuated by RAF VC 10.

28 June HMS *Hydra*: 51 British casualties evacuated by RAF VC 10.

8 July Flight-Lieutenant Glover arrives in Montevideo by Argentine military aircraft. Departs by civil flight following day.

12 July HMS *Hydra*: 56 British casualties evacuated by RAF VC 10.

ANNEX II

Statistics: Montevideo 2 April-12 July, 1982

UK/Falkland Islander civilians evacuated	...	...	...	...	100
NP 8901 (Marines) prisoners returned to UK	...	...	...	...	121
British casualties from Hospital Ships to VC 10s	...	...	...	...	555
British POW (Fl.-Lt. Glover)	...	...	...	...	1
Argentine POWs returned via Montevideo	...	...	...	...	1,181
Medical stores transferred from VC 10s to Hospital Ships	...	...	...	...	Just under 29 tons
Arrivals of staff at Embassy (excluding dependants)	...	...	...	...	31
Departures of staff from Embassy (excluding dependants)	...	...	...	...	18
Number of Notes sent to the MFA	...	...	...	...	245
Inward telegrams (from all sources)	...	...	...	...	1,979
Outward telegrams—including repetitions	...	...	...	...	1,561
—excluding repetitions	...	...	...	...	944