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FM BELMOPAN 082350Z APR 82

TO IMMEDIATE F C O

TELEGRAM NUMBER 140 OF 8 APRIL 1982

FALKLAND ISLANDS : BELIZE/GUATEMALA

1. BELIZEANS HAVE BEEN WATCHING THE FALKLANDS DRAMA CLOSELY AND WITH CONCERN FOR ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THEIR OWN POSITION VIS-A-VIS GUATEMALA. THIS CONCERN WILL BE HEIGHTENED BY THE GUATEMALAN FOREIGN MINISTERS DECLARATION OF SUPPORT FOR THE ARGENTINE ACTION AND HIS ANTICIPATION OF RECIPROCAL ARGENTINE SUPPORT FOR GUATEMALA IN THE SUPPOSED PARALLEL CASE OF BELIZE. TO SOME EXTENT PRICE'S PROMPT CONDEMNATION OF THE ARGENTINE ACTION REFLECTS BELIZE'S CLEAR SELF-INTEREST. BUT HE HAS ALSO GENUINELY WISHED TO BE HELPFUL AND HAS CONSULTED ME OVER HIS VARIOUS MESSAGES AND STATEMENTS. I HAVE TRIED TO STEER THESE GENTLY IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION WITHOUT CREATING THE FEELING THAT THIS WAS EXPECTED AS A QUID PRO QUO FOR BRITISH PROTECTION AGAINST GUATEMALA. FOR HIS PART PRICE HAS GIVEN NO INDICATION THAT HE EXPECTS HIS LOYALTY TO BE REWARDED BY A FAVOURABLE DECISION ON HIS REQUEST FOR AN EXTENSION OF OUR COMMITMENT; HE WOULD BE LESS THAN HUMAN IF HE DOES NOT HOPE THAT IT WILL.
2. WE STILL OWE HIM A SUBSTANTIVE REPLY TO HIS MESSAGE TO THE PRIME MINISTER. HE HAS NOT PRESSED ME ON THIS. I WOULD GUESS THAT HE INTERPRETS THE DELAY AS INDICATING THAT WE NOT REPEAT NOT HOLD RIGIDLY TO THE PRESENT DEADLINE. THE EVENTS OF THE PAST FEW DAYS MAY HAVE REINFORCED THIS VIEW PARTICULARLY IF HE HAS CALCULATED THAT GIVEN THE CRITICISM THEY HAVE HAD OVER THE FALKLAND ISLANDS BRITISH MINISTERS WOULD NOT WISH TO INCUR THE INEVITABLE ACCUSATIONS THAT WE WERE ABANDONING BELIZE TO A SIMILAR FATE AND THAT THE SHORTER THE LEAD TIME FOR WITHDRAWAL THE MORE OPEN WE WOULD BE TO SUCH CRITICISM. (WE ARE AWARE THAT SOME BRITISH CORRESPONDENTS ARE ALREADY INTERESTED IN THIS ASPECT.) IF EARLY WITHDRAWAL IS NONTHELESS CONFIRMED HE WILL TRY TO ENLIST ALL THE SUPPORT HE CAN MUSTER TO BRING PRESSURE ON US TO RELENT: THE FALKLANDS CASE ASSURES HIM A SYMPATHETIC RESPONSE.
3. THERE HAVE OF COURSE ALREADY BEEN RUMOURS ABOUT THE DATE OF WITHDRAWAL WHICH HAVE NOT GENERATED NOTICEABLE PUBLIC ALARM. THIS IS PARTLY BECAUSE BELIZEANS ARE ACCUSTOMED TO SCARE STORIES, BUT THE STATEMENTS WE HAVE ISSUED, ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE BEEN CAREFULLY WORDED NOT TO EXCLUDE THE POSSIBILITY OF EARLY DEPARTURE, HAVE ALSO BEEN TAKEN AS REASSURING. AT THE TIME OF INDEPENDENCE MOST BELIZEANS PROBABLY THOUGHT THAT THE QUOTE APPROPRIATE PERIOD UNQUOTE WOULD BE MEASURED IN YEARS. THEY MAY NOW REALISE IT WILL NOT BE SO LONG. BUT FEW BELIEVE WITHDRAWAL WILL HAPPEN IN LESS THAN THREE MONTHS TIME: OTHERWISE, SURELY, THE RUN DOWN WOULD ALREADY HAVE BEGUN. IN SOME CASES THERE MAY AN OSTRICH-LIKE RELUCTANCE TO FACT THE ISSUE: IN OTHERS A BELIEF THAT IF WE GO SOME OTHER ARRANGEMENT WILL HAVE BEEN MADE FOR THEIR CONTINUED PROTECTION. SINCE THE GUATEMALAN CCUP SEEMS TO HAVE DESTROYED

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ANY CHANCE OF AN EARLY NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT THE NEED FOR SUCH PROTECTION IS STILL FELT. THE DEEP-SEATED FEAR OF GUATEMALA REMAINS AND THE INVASION OF THE FALKLAND ISLANDS MUST HAVE INCREASED IT. I HAVE ALWAYS EXPECTED THAT THE REACTION TO THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF AN EARLY DEPARTURE DATE, WOULD BE PANIC AND RECRIMINATION (PERHAPS VIOLENT) AGAINST THE BELIZEAN AND BRITISH GOVERNMENTS: THE FALKLAND CRISIS MAKES THIS EVEN MORE CERTAIN.

4. I SHOULD BE GRATEFUL TO KNOW HOW THE JIC NOW ASSESS THE THREAT FROM GUATEMALA. THERE IS LITTLE EVIDENCE SO FAR OF THE POLICY THE NEW REGIME WILL FOLLOW: BUT WE SHOULD BEAR IN MIND THAT THE JUNTA APPEARS TO DEPEND ON SUPPORT FROM THE JUNIOR OFFICERS, WHOM WE HAVE ALWAYS BELIEVED TO BE HAWKISH ON BELIZE. IF, AS WE HAVE HEARD REPORTED, THE JUNTA ALREADY FEELS THREATENED BY SUPPORTERS OF THE FORMER GOVERNMENT, RIOS MONTT MIGHT CONSIDER THAT A FOREIGN ADVENTURE WOULD BE ONE WAY OF RALLYING SUPPORT. THE QUOTE MACHISMO UNQUOTE OF THE GUATEMALAN MILITARY HAS BEEN GIVEN A JOLT AND GUATEMALAN CIVILIANS CAN BE COUNTED ON TO DRAW MALICIOUS COMPARISONS WITH THE MANLINESS OF THE ARGENTINE FORCES TO ADD TO THEIR DISCOMFORTURE. THIS MAY CREASE THE CHANCE OF RASHNESS. SEEN FROM HERE IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT SOME ELEMENTS AT LEAST MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO BELIEVE THAT A TIME WHEN MOST OF OUR ATTENTION AND RESCURCES ARE DIRECTED WLSEWHERE COULD BE A PROPITICUS MOMENT FOR SOME MOVE AGAINST BELIZE.

IT IS ALSO A TIME WHEN WE AND NOT THEY MAY BE ISOLATED, AT LEAST WITHIN LATIN AMERICA. MOREOVER, ARGENTINA MAY WELL URGE THE GUATEMALANS TO TAKE SUCH ACTION TO GIVE US ANOTHER MAJOR MILITARY PRE-OCCUPATION. DESPITE THE LACK OF EVIDENCE OF ANY GUATEMALAN PREPARATIONS THESE THOUGHTS MAKE ME UNEASY AND I HAVE DISCUSSED THEM WITH CBF. PENDING ANY FURTHER INDICATORS BRITISH FORCES WILL BE MAINTAINING A HEIGHTENED STATE OF INTELLIGENCE ALERTNESS AND NORMAL ROUTINE OPERATIONAL PATROLLING (IE SIX PATROLS IN THE JUNGLE AT ANY TIME).

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