SECRET AND PERSONAL

Prime Minister (1)
Duty Clerk 22/4

This is a copy. The original has been extracted and retained under Section 3(4).

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

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22 April 1982

Dear John,

Threat to British Citizens from the Argentine Security Services

Thank you for your letter of 22 April.

The objective of giving publicity to this threat would be to offer at least an oblique warning to British citizens in the area about the risks they could face from terrorist action by the Argentine security services and also to warn the Argentine Government that we were aware of this potential threat.

HM Ambassador at Montevideo considered that we should approach the Uruguayan authorities before taking any action to inspire publicity on this pretext. Otherwise there would be a risk of antagonising them and possibly jeopardising co-operation in other fields.

The Ambassador was accordingly instructed to speak to the Foreign Ministry. Their response was that we should not take the threat from the group concerned (Gadim) seriously; that any warnings might be counterproductive by giving ideas to other groups; and that they doubted whether the Uruguayan police could offer more protection than they already were. Miss Hutchinson added that she was not hopeful that the Uruguayans would take effective action but that they had at least had their attention focussed on the problem at high level.

The Ambassador was also concerned that publicity about this threat could start a mass exodus from Uruguay by both British residents there and by British people normally resident in Argentina who were in Montevideo during the crisis. She doubted whether publicity would effectively reduce the threat.

There can be no guarantee about the results of any inspired publicity. The story may well receive emotional treatment in the press and its effect on the British communities in Argentina and neighbouring countries would be

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unpredictable. Publicity would at least serve to warn them of the threat and give them an opportunity to leave or take precautions. But there must also be a chance that it would lead to serious, and perhaps unnecessary, alarm in the British communities.

If the Argentine Government are intent on such terrorist action, publicity may not dissuade them. But it could none the less inhibit their freedom of action.

In the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's absence, Mr Onslow has considered the pros and cons. He has looked at the evidence *

* In the light of this Mr Onslow considers that we should take action to inspire publicity. It would be possible for the FCO News Department to feed a story to one journalist. I enclose the text of the line which could be taken in an unattributable briefing. The story would no doubt then be picked up by the rest of the media and questions put to the FCO. I also enclose the line which News Department could then take both on and off the record.

If the Prime Minister is content, the FCO News Department will take action early on 23 April.

I am copying this letter to David Omand (Ministry of Defence), John Halliday (Home Office) and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours ever

(J E Holmes)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

~ Passage deleted and retained under Section 3(4) OWayland 12 April 2012