

SUBJECT



File

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

28 May 1982

Dear Mr Fall,

CALL BY CARDINAL CASAROLI

Your people told us this afternoon that Cardinal Casaroli, the Cardinal Secretary of State, had asked whether he could pay a courtesy call on the Prime Minister while the Pope was in London, and with her agreement he came here at 1840 this evening. He was accompanied by another prelate whom I am afraid we never identified.

The courtesy call in fact lasted 50 minutes and was devoted, at the Cardinal's initiative, very largely to the Falklands issue. He began by saying how grateful the Pope was for the suggestion of the British Government that Ministers should not be involved in his visit. This had done much to make it possible for him to come. He was very glad to be in Britain and he was delighted at the very warm and cordial welcome which virtually all parts of the community had extended to him in the course of the day. The Pope was looking forward enormously to his visit to Canterbury Cathedral which would be a historic event in every sense. His call upon The Queen had gone very well and they had had a long conversation. The Pope had asked him to convey his greetings to the Prime Minister and other members of the Government.

Cardinal Casaroli went on to say that the Holy Father was looking forward to the Special Session on Disarmament at the United Nations. He, the Cardinal, would deliver a message from the Pope to the Special Session on 11 June. But inevitably everybody was wondering whether it was useful to speak about disarmament when we could all see the difficulties which existed in the international community.

The Prime Minister said that she was very pleased indeed that the Pope had been able to go ahead with his visit to Britain. As for the Special Session on Disarmament, she understood why there must be doubts in people's minds at present about the value of such a meeting. But she felt that she had to attend. She would make a speech about the values we had to defend. She would explain why those values had to be defended. She would have to speak about her personal belief in freedom, justice and democracy. She hoped very much to be able to present her ideas in fresh and striking language.

/Cardinal Casaroli

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Cardinal Casaroli said that the Pope had asked him to express to the Prime Minister some thoughts about the Falklands crisis. The Holy Father understood very well the problem for Britain for finding a way out of the situation that was peaceful and, at the same time, respected the principles of justice and freedom. But the Pope's fear was that a situation like this could have very serious and dangerous consequences of a more general kind. He was deeply concerned that the outcome of the crisis could be the psychological, political and military separation of the whole of Latin America from the Western World; and he saw the Western World not just as a political entity but even more as an ideological entity. He feared that the Soviet Union would take advantage of the situation to create a gap between Latin America and the West.

The Pope was of course also desperately anxious about the loss of life in the South Atlantic. His hesitation about coming to Britain had not been concern with the possible Argentine reaction but how it would be viewed by the British people at a time when so many young lives were at risk and so many families were deeply worried. But the British Bishops had assured the Pope that his visit would be a joyful occasion and, so it was proving to be.

Cardinal Casaroli said that the Pope hoped that the Prime Minister would do everything possible to reach a peaceful, just and honourable solution to the crisis. The honour of the country, the security of the Falkland Islanders and respect for international law were all valuable principles which the Pope well understood. But he also wondered whether other principles might be involved. He had heard it said that the Islands had a strategic importance in securing the passage from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. But surely it would be better to have Latin America, and the Argentine in particular established in a good relationship to the Western World rather than to rely on the strategic position of the Falkland Islands. In short the Holy Father's message was that it would be a blessing for the United Kingdom, for the Argentine and the free world if it were possible to reach a just and honourable compromise and a peaceful solution.

The Prime Minister said that the British Government had not wanted to send forces to the Falkland Islands. But we had been the victims of aggression. The Falkland Islands were British territory in law and the Islanders were British people. Some of them went back seven generations: they were a hard-working and God-fearing people. They led a life of their own choosing. They had lived in freedom, with democratic institutions and a just law. They did not want to live under Argentinian rule. Their peace had been shattered. For these reasons Britain had had to defend her own people. If she had not done so, not only would she have failed the Islanders but other peoples, like Guyana and Belize when they have felt themselves threatened. Similarly, Gibraltar was British and the people of Gibraltar wished to remain British. The United Kingdom was not a colonial power. No other country had freely brought so many colonies to independence. We should like to bring the Falkland Islands to a secure independence too.

/War was

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War was a terrible evil, but there were worse things including the extinction of all that one believed in. We could not allow aggression to succeed. We could not bargain away the freedom, justice and democracy which the Falkland Islanders had enjoyed to the Argentine where these things were unknown. There could be no compromise on these matters, but she wanted to make it clear that we were not fighting the Argentine in Argentina. All we were saying to them was "Please go home and leave The Queen's people and The Queen's territory". She could not give away the Falkland Islanders' way of life. It was for her to defend it, and so to defend small and weak countries elsewhere. This was the essence of the British position: there was certainly a strategic factor but it was secondary. We had tried for seven weeks to find a diplomatic solution to the problem. We had been prepared to compromise: we had been ready to have a UN Administrator instead of a Governor and we had been prepared to accept the parallel withdrawal of forces. We had tried to find a solution that saved Argentinian face. We had done everything to stop the conflict. But the Argentines had not responded, and so we had been unsuccessful.

Cardinal Casaroli assured the Prime Minister that the Holy See was completely aware of all the reasons which underlay the British position. But the Holy Father remained worried about the general dangers which he had described earlier. The Holy Father asked the Prime Minister not to lose faith and courage. He was not asking the British Government to compromise on its principles but he prayed earnestly that they would take account of other principles which were no less important in the effort to find a peaceful solution. Similarly, the Pope hoped that the Argentine Government would realise that the best course for them lay in reaching an agreement.

The Prime Minister said that there could not be a compromise between right and wrong. The loss of lives in the South Atlantic was tragic, and every time there was a death she asked herself whether the British Government had taken the right course. But the answer was that we would not be enjoying freedom in Britain today if people had not died for it in the past. That was why we had to say to the aggressor 'enough'. She repeated that Britain had done everything it possibly could for seven weeks to find a peaceful solution in which we were willing to compromise not on principles but on practicalities.

In response to a question by Cardinal Casaroli the Prime Minister said that there might be a possible role for the United States in guaranteeing the future security of the Falkland Islanders. As she had already said, it might be possible to bring the Falkland Islands to independence. This would mean that neither the United Kingdom nor the Argentine had sovereignty over the Islands. Moreover, such a development would be in accordance with Article 73 of the UN Charter. The Islands had a great deal of economic potential, and this could be developed provided there was no military threat. An international guarantee of the Islands security would be needed, and this might be provided by the United States, the United Kingdom, and possibly, Brazil. But this was all for the longer term and in the meantime we had to defend the liberty of British citizens. She wished to emphasise, however, that when the present crisis was over, the United Kingdom would make every effort to hold out the hand of friendship to all countries of Latin America, including the Argentine. We did not want a victory: what we wanted was the recovery of British territory.

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/In conclusion



In conclusion the Prime Minister and Cardinal Casaroli agreed that they would both say to the Press no more than that they had had a wholly private talk. The Cardinal thanked the Prime Minister for giving him so much of her time, and the Prime Minister said that she had been very glad to have the opportunity to explain Britain's position on the Falkland Islands.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to other members of OD(SA) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely,  
Charlotte Stevens  
for Anne Whitmore

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Brian Fall, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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