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FM FCO 141930Z JUNE 82
TO IMMEDIATE WASHINGTON
TELEGRAM NUMBER 1168 OF 14 JUNE

FALKLAND ISLANDS: US HELP WITH THE REPATRIATION OF PRISONERS

1. IN DISCUSSIONS OF THE FALKLAND ISLANDS WITH PRESIDENT REAGAN LAST WEEK, THE PRIME MINISTER RAISED THE QUESTION OF THE REPATRIATION OF ARGENTINE PRISONERS OF WAR (POWS). SHE SAID THAT WE WOULD FACE DIFFICULTIES IN HANDLING LARGE NUMBERS OF POWS AFTER THE RECAPTURE OF PORT STANLEY. SHE ADDED THAT WE HOPED THAT THEY COULD BE USED AS A BARGAINING COUNTER TO PERSUADE THE ARGENTINES TO AGREE TO A LASTING PEACE IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC. REFERRING TO THE SERIOUS LOGISTIC PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN HANDLING SUCH A LARGE NUMBER OF PRISONERS, THE PRIME MINISTER SAID WE WOULD BE GRATEFUL FOR US ASSISTANCE AND HOPED WE COULD MAKE A DETAILED REQUEST WHEN WE KNOW MORE CLEARLY WHAT HELP WE NEEDED. THE PRESIDENT INDICATED ASSENT.
2. WE HAVE NOT YET DECIDED HOW TO HANDLE THE QUESTION OF REPATRIATION. BUT, GIVEN THE LIKELY NUMBERS INVOLVED, WE MAY WISH TO SEND BACK A SUBSTANTIAL PROPORTION, WHILE FOR THE TIME BEING RETAINING AS POWS CERTAIN CLASSES OF ARGENTINE PERSONNEL (EG OFFICERS, NCOs, SPECIAL FORCES, TROOPS WITH TACTICAL KNOWLEDGE WHICH COULD BE OF USE TO ARGENTINE MILITARY COMMANDERS). IN THE MEANWHILE WE THINK IT WOULD BE WISE TO REMIND THE AMERICANS OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT REAGAN AND TO MAKE CLEAR THAT WE INTEND TO GET IN TOUCH WITH THEM AS SOON AS THE SITUATION IS MORE CLEAR CUT.
3. GRATEFUL THEREFORE IF YOU WOULD SPEAK ON EARLIEST SUITABLE OCCASION TO HAIG (OR EAGLEBURGER). YOU SHOULD SAY THAT WE WELCOMED REAGAN'S EXPRESSION OF READINESS TO HELP US WITH REPATRIATION. GIVEN THE NUMBERS INVOLVED, WE SHOULD CERTAINLY NEED HELP WHEN THE TIME CAME. AT THIS JUNCTURE HOWEVER WE WERE NOT IN A POSITION TO GIVE THE AMERICANS A CLEAR INDICATION OF

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THE NUMBERS OF POWS LIKELY TO BE INVOLVED IN REPATRIATION, NOR OF THE MOST PROMISING COLLECTION POINTS OR TRANSIT ROUTES. MUCH WOULD DEPEND UPON THE CIRCUMSTANCES AT THE TIME, INCLUDING OUR ABILITY TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE AND SUITABLY GUARDED FACILITIES FOR INTERNMENT. NEVERTHELESS, OUR PREDICTION WAS THAT THE NUMBERS COULD BE CONSIDERABLE AND THAT WE MIGHT SEE ADVANTAGE IN REPATRIATING AT A RELATIVELY EARLY STAGE LOW GRADE PERSONNEL, IN PARTICULAR RECRUITS.

3. PLEASE TELL THE AMERICANS THAT AS SOON AS THIS PICTURE IS CLEARER WE SHALL GET IN TOUCH WITH THEM AGAIN. IN THE MEANTIME WE WOULD HOPE THAT THEY COULD GIVE SOME PRELIMINARY THOUGHT TO THE LOGISTIC PROBLEMS OF REPATRIATING SEVERAL THOUSAND ARGENTINE PRISONERS. IT WOULD BE PARTICULARLY USEFUL TO KNOW NOW WHAT KIND OF PRACTICAL HELP THEY MIGHT BE ABLE TO GIVE.

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