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16 June 1982

I enclose a copy of a letter which the Prime Minister received yesterday from the Commonwealth Secretary General, and a copy of the reply which Mrs Thatcher has sent.

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John Holmes, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

John

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15 June, 1982

My Dear Prime Minister,

I could not let this morning pass without writing to extend my most sincere congratulations both on the victory of British forces in the Falklands, and on the success it involves for your personal commitment to the principles for which you and your Government stood steadfast in the conflict. In an address to the Commonwealth Press Union a few moments ago, I have attempted to say all this more publicly; I enclose a copy, not for reading, but for your records.

You have had evidence throughout the conflict of genuine support from many quarters in the Commonwealth. I know that today's conclusion of hostilities will bring great rejoicing and deep relief in the capitals of many of your colleague Heads of Government who, I am sure, will convey their own congratulations directly.

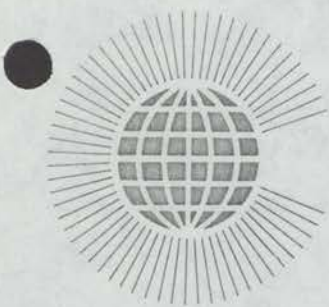
I have always believed that this cause was not Britain's alone. What has triumphed, therefore, are the principles for which you stood steadfast on behalf of a wider international community. In the days that lie ahead, when Britain may need to draw upon the involvement of others, I trust that acknowledgement of the service you rendered through bearing the brunt of the conflict will encourage a sharing of the burden of peace. Please be assured of my personal commitment to assisting in all the ways I can in these and other respects.

Shridath S. Ramphal

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The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, MP,
Prime Minister of Great Britain &
Northern Ireland,
10 Downing Street,
London, S.W.1.

enc.



Commonwealth Information

NOT BRITAIN'S CAUSE ALONE

Extracts from an address by

Mr Shridath S Ramphal
Commonwealth Secretary-General

to the

Commonwealth Press Union,
Marlborough House

London, 15 June 1982

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Meetings of the CPU are always important events on my calendar. I am delighted that it has become possible for me to be with you this morning even though it looked unlikely a few days ago:

You meet in London - perhaps appropriately in this house - at a time of considerable confidence in our Commonwealth association. It is a time betwixt Melbourne and New Delhi when Commonwealth leaders are confident of their relationships and of the value of their association. A time when the Commonwealth Games are assured and we can be pleased with our own record of conflict resolution - of the smoothing out of difficulties through adherence to principles - which have made the Games possible; a time when I hope we might look forward, through the work of Commonwealth countries both in the Contact Group and among the Front Line States to success at last in the struggle for freedom in Namibia; a time when through an improvement in the financial resources of the CFTC we can pursue our quota of practical work in Commonwealth co-operation on development. These are no small achievements in a world that does not boast very many in the area of relations between nations and almost none in the area of real development.

But I should like to speak to you not on these matters, but of another from which I believe the Commonwealth will ultimately draw even greater strength, the crisis in the Falklands which tested both Britain and the Commonwealth, but in which each has triumphed on the side of principle.

As I speak to you this morning the news was coming in of the success of British forces in the Falklands. I know you will share a sense of great rejoicing and of deep relief - sentiments that will be echoed today around the Commonwealth - indeed around the world. I hope you will permit me a few reflections on what is on any assessment a day of great victory not merely for Britain although that it assuredly is, but for the cause for which she stood steadfast - a cause let us remember above all else which was not Britain's alone.

No state initiates military action save under cover of a cause it asserts - or even believes - to be righteous. But, as Argentina has so painfully demonstrated, a sense of national righteousness is an unreliable guide to what is just or tolerable in these matters; all too often it blurs the line between permissible ends and unacceptable means. Yet the distinction is essential if we are to have any semblance of world order.

In the case of the Falklands, Argentina has attempted to blur that distinction - between claims to sovereignty and the attempt to enforce them by arms - by two arguments. In the first place, it raised the spectre of colonialism.

This in a bid to secure Latin American solidarity and win wider Third World support, for decolonisation is a worthy banner to which many will rally. It was a facile ploy. Argentina did not invade the Falklands to liberate the people of the Islands from British rule, but to impose Argentinian rule over them against their will. The principal impediment to their independence is fear of an irredentist neighbour. There are many countries in the world, a large number in the Commonwealth, especially small countries, who were not taken in by so unlikely a crusader waving the anti-colonial banner. They may have had no ships to contribute, no trade to forego, no loans to embargo, but they did not hesitate to stand up to be counted against Argentina's resort to force by invasion of the islands.

The second argument had the effect of standing on its head the United Nations Charter's acknowledged right of national self-defence. It claimed that by invading the Falklands, Argentina was exercising the right of self-defence against aggression by Britain - aggression which it said was committed in 1833, some 150 years ago. In other words, in an area where successive imperial powers held sway, Argentina said that the forcible assertion of claims inherited from the anterior (Spanish) coloniser over those of the ultimate (British) one is self-defence. What terrible vistas of international conflict this conjures up! It is the 'rights' of Spanish over British conquest in this case; it could be those of the French over the Dutch in another and perhaps of the Portuguese over them all.

Territorial disputes exist in many parts of the world; the attempt to change boundaries by force of arms - and that is the issue here - is fraught with grave danger to world peace. It was this danger that led the Organisation of African Unity, in almost its first resolution after its founding, to assert its acceptance of the boundaries left by the colonial powers at the end of their scramble for Africa - artificial, haphazard and fraught with problems for the future as they were known to be. No other position would have been consistent with the paramount need for stability and security as African nations undertook the crucial tasks of nation-building and development.

For these reasons too, the world, through the United Nations, has set its face against the acquisition of territory by force, proclaimed the integrity of border everywhere and outlawed aggression. The implications of re-staging world-wide the armed contest of colonial powers - under whatever new names - in the age of the missile, not to speak of the nuclear war-head - are too horrendous to envisage.

There are, for example, some 40 or more territorial disputes in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Some of those involved are small countries, new to independence. Few realise that today there are over 60 states with populations of under 1 million; over 30 with populations of less than 200,000.

The temptations to predators are great; only an environment that elevates freedom from aggression to a global ethic and practical international arrangements that secure it are likely to curb those temptations and preserve that freedom.

It is not without significance that the expectation in Buenos Aires, as is now acknowledged, was that Britain would not be drawn into the conflict; that it would be Argentina against the Falklands; that a strong continental power armed with the most sophisticated weapons would easily overrun a defenceless island people before the world could lift a finger or even raise its voice. It was a scenario which assumed the primacy of the law of the jungle over the rule of law.

The fabric of international legal order is a fragile creation: it must be constantly strengthened, layer by layer, if we are to prevent international relations from assuming a Hobbesian character. Each time aggression succeeds that danger looms. Just as only a fractional electoral swing may unseat a government, so small shifts in the prevailing global ethic can tip the balance from relative stability to widespread chaos. Events in the Falklands, and now in Lebanon, are an indication of just how precarious that balance is.

There have been situations, of course, where aggressors have been allowed to have their way; and not only in the post war era. Mussolini's act of aggression against Abyssinia in the autumn of 1935 was a signal the world did not heed. Each such occasion encourages the next and jeopardises global stability. That historical pattern of acquiescence (which on occasion has included Britain) is a sad commentary on the world's nations and on their collective will and capacity to act against aggression. All the more, therefore, has Britain's response in this instance been a service to the world community which condemned the invader but lacked the means to deny him the fruits of aggression, which demanded his withdrawal but was powerless to enforce its demand.

But let us have no illusions that this one act of service in turning back aggression will deter all others for all time. It would certainly help to do so; but there are many would-be aggressors similarly poised. If Britain's response is to contribute effectively to a more peaceful and stable world in which there is respect for international legal order, it is important that that honourable response be seen throughout the world as an act of service in that collective cause. And we must, particularly in the Third World, not hesitate to say so.

But Britain's stand in the Falklands, with all the sacrifice and heart-searching and danger inevitably involved could yet serve an even wider cause if it helps to ensure for

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future that the burden of making the world safe for all is shared by all; that the answer to the threat of aggression, indeed of aggression itself, must not depend alone on the capacity and the resolve of the victim to respond. We do not permit it in our national societies; we should not require it in our global society. Aggression in any part of the world is a crime against the whole world. It is time that we ensured, as the UN Charter promised, that the responsibility for security against aggression is a collective dimension as well.

The Charter had envisaged a situation in which all countries could feel secure under the umbrella of an international order backed by the collective strength of the world community and a commitment to use that strength through the machinery of the United Nations. Sadly for the United Nations itself, but also for the world's people, that promise was not kept. The politics and perceptions of the Cold War era effectively frustrated the emergence of a system of law and order worldwide in which security was a shared international responsibility. There are 'warriors' of various kinds still around who take pride in that state of collective impotence.

In its Report just published (Common Security - A Programme for Disarmament), the Palme Commission, whose membership included public figures from East and West, North and South, has called for at least a limited implementation of the original concept of collective security. Its approach which goes beyond the area of 'traditional' disarmament, is essentially pragmatic and evolutionary. It acknowledges that the superpowers would not easily be persuaded against being their own centurions, nor would their strongest allies. But, mindful that since 1945 over a hundred wars have occurred in the Third World, albeit with varying degrees of major power involvement, it puts forward specific proposals for deterring aggression - for preventing hostilities before they erupt.

The proposals envisage fact-finding missions, military observer teams and UN military forces, all in advance of military conflict. The system would be backed up by a political 'concordat' between the permanent members of the Security Council assuring the United Nations of the will and the means to prevent armed conflict rather than leaving it at the mercy of unpredictable political reaction once hostilities had broken out. The Commission's proposals would limit these first steps in a system of collective security to situations of conflict between Third World countries arising out of border disputes or threats to territorial integrity caused by other factors, but without seeking to prejudice the substantive issues themselves.

The Report was completed well before the Falklands crisis erupted. Events in the South Atlantic have now given the recommendations poignancy and a heightened insistence. Essentially, what the Report is urging is that collective

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security has become the concomitant of disarmament; that the concept of national security must evolve into a higher one of common security; and that there is no time to postpone making a start.

There will be many difficult questions ahead in relation to the future governance of the Falklands; but I venture to think none more important in the long run than our success in making a start towards a world in which we collectively uphold the law of nations by collectively securing respect for it.