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FM FCO 171600Z JUN 82

TO FLASH BERNE

TELEGRAM NUMBER 124 OF 17 JUNE

AND TO FLASH WASHINGTON, SANTIAGO, BRASILIA, MONTEVIDEO AND UKMIS GENEVA

INFO IMMEDIATE UKMIS NEW YORK, MODUK (DS 5, DS11, SC AND L) AND CINCFLEET.

REPATRIATION OF ARGENTINE POWS

1. WE ARE DEEPLY CONCERNED THAT THE CONDITION OF ARGENTINE POWS ON THE FALKLAND ISLANDS AND OUR EFFORTS TO REPATRIATE THEM AS SOON AS POSSIBLE HAVE BEEN MISUNDERSTOOD (OR IN SOME CASES MISREPRESENTED).

2. THE FACTS ARE THAT THE ARGENTINE POWS WERE FOUND IN AN APPALLING STATE (VIZ THE REPORTS FROM THE TASK FORCE COMMANDER) AND WE HAVE NO MEANS OF GIVING THEM ADEQUATE SHELTER OR PROTECTION IN BLIZZARD CONDITIONS ON THE ISLANDS. WE HAVE ASKED THE ARGENTINES TO AGREE THAT WE SHOULD REPATRIATE THESE TROOPS TO ARGENTINE PORTS AND FOR THIS PURPOSE WE NEED A GUARANTEE OF SAFE CONDUCT FOR OUR SHIPS. WE ARE NOT, REPEAT NOT, UNREASONABLY USING THE PRISONERS OF WAR AS A BARGAINING COUNTER. THE ARGENTINES IN RESPONSE HAVE SAID MERELY THAT THE PRISONERS SHOULD BE REPATRIATED TO MONTEVIDEO. THIS FACES US WITH A SEVERE PRACTICAL AND HUMANITARIAN PROBLEM. IF THE PRISONERS ARE REPATRIATED TO AN ARGENTINE PORT (PREFERABLY COMODORO RIVADAVIA) THE RETURN JOURNEY FROM THE FALKLAND ISLANDS WILL TAKE 48 HOURS. FOR A JOURNEY AS SHORT AS THIS WE COULD LOAD THE CANBERRA WITH 5,000 PRISONERS OF WAR. (SIMILAR CONSIDERATIONS APPLY TO THE USE OF PUNTA ARENAS WHICH IS ALSO WITHIN ABOUT 24 HOURS SAILING TIME OF THE FALKLAND ISLANDS). IF THE PRISONERS HAVE TO BE TAKEN TO MONTEVIDEO THE TRAVEL TIME WOULD BE CONSIDERABLY LONGER. MOREOVER, WE CANNOT DOCK THE CANBERRA ALONGSIDE AT MONTEVIDEO AND PRISONERS WOULD PROBABLY HAVE TO BE DISEMBARKED FROM OFFSHORE BY BOAT, AN OPERATION WHICH WOULD

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ADD FURTHER DELAY. THUS ARGENTINE INSISTENCE UPON THE USE OF MONTEVIDEO WILL SLOW DOWN THE WHOLE PROCESS OF REPATRIATION. IT WILL INCREASE THE SAILING TIME CONSIDERABLY, THEREBY DELAYING FURTHER TRIPS. THE ARGENTINE INSISTENCE UPON MONTEVIDEO DISPLAYS AN INCOMPREHENSIBLE LACK OF INTEREST ON THEIR PART IN THE WELL-BEING OF THEIR OWN PEOPLE.

3. THE CANBERRA WILL BE LOADED AND READY TO SAIL LATE THIS EVENING. PLEASE THEREFORE SPEAK IMMEDIATELY TO THE SWISS AND ASK THEM TO PUT THE POINTS IN PARAGRAPH 2 ABOVE (EXCLUDING MENTION OF PUNTA ARENAS) TO THE ARGENTINES AS A MATTER OF GREAT URGENCY. THEY SHOULD EMPHASIZE THAT THIS IS NOT A QUESTION OF PUTTING PRESSURE ON THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT. OUR MOTIVES ARE HUMANITARIAN, MOTIVES WHICH WE WOULD EXPECT THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT TO SHARE.

4. (FOR BRASILIA AND WASHINGTON). GRATEFUL IF YOU WOULD ASK THE BRAZILIAN AND US GOVERNMENTS URGENTLY TO REINFORCE THE POINTS ABOVE WITH THE ARGENTINE JUNTA. YOU SHOULD SAY THAT, OUR ONLY ALTERNATIVE FOR RAPID REPATRIATION IS THE USE OF PUNTA ARENAS. BUT FOR THIS THERE WOULD HAVE TO BE AGREEMENT BETWEEN ARGENTINA AND CHILE. IF IN THEIR CONTACTS WITH THE ARGENTINES IT IS CLEAR THAT AGREEMENT TO THE USE OF ARGENTINE PORTS IS OUT OF THE QUESTION, THE AMERICANS AND BRAZILIANS COULD, AS A FALL-BACK, URGE THE ARGENTINES TO MAKE IMMEDIATE ARRANGEMENTS WITH CHILE. PLEASE ALSO TELL THE AMERICANS AND BRAZILIANS THAT WE ARE EXAMINING URGENTLY THE POSSIBILITY OF SOME EVACUATION BY AIR. THE PROBLEM IS LACK OF AIRCRAFT. ONE POSSIBILITY MIGHT BE FOR THE AMERICANS AND BRAZILIANS TO LEND TO THE ARGENTINES C-130 TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT FOR THIS PURPOSE. YOU SHOULD SAY THAT THIS IDEA IS MERELY UNDER CONSIDERATION AT THE PRESENT MOMENT AND WE ARE NOT ASKING THEM TO TAKE ANY ACTION. A PRELIMINARY REACTION TO THE IDEA WOULD, HOWEVER, BE HELPFUL.

5. (FOR SANTIAGO). PLEASE REHEARSE AGAIN WITH THE CHILEAN GOVERNMENT, ON THE LINES SET OUT ABOVE, THE REASONS WHY THE USE OF PUNTA ARENAS MAY BE OF CRITICAL IMPORTANCE.

6. (FOR MONTEVIDEO). PLEASE INFORM THE URUGUAYAN GOVERNMENT OF THE ARGENTINE REACTION (BRASILIA TELEGRAM NO 232),

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EXPLAINING THAT WE ARE MAKING ANOTHER ATTEMPT THROUGH THE SWISS TO OBTAIN ARGENTINE AGREEMENT TO THE USE OF ARGENTINE PORTS AND, FAILING THAT, WITH THE CHILEANS FOR THE USE OF PUNTA ARENAS: BUT THAT WE MAY IN THE END NEED TO ASK THEM URGENTLY FOR AGREEMENT TO THE USE OF MONTEVIDEO. OUR UNDERSTANDING IS THAT, ALTHOUGH THE CANBERRA CANNOT DOCK IN MONTEVIDEO, IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO BRING THE SHIP SUFFICIENTLY CLOSE TO HARBOUR TO ALLOW RELATIVELY RAPID DISEMARCATION OF THE POWS BY SMALL BOATS. PLEASE STRESS THAT THIS IS A PRELIMINARY WARNING ONLY. WE SHALL, OF COURSE, LET YOU KNOW AS SOON AS THE SITUATION IS CLEARER. MEANWHILE PLEASE EXPRESS GRATITUDE TO THE URUGUAYANS FOR THEIR READINESS TO TAKE THE NORLAND. A FINAL DECISION ON THIS WILL DEPEND ON WHAT CAN BE DONE WITH THE CANBERRA.

7. (FOR UKMIS GENEVA): SEPARATE INSTRUCTIONS HAVE BEEN SENT.

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