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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

14 May, 1984

Relations with Argentina

The Prime Minister has seen the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's minute of 9 May and agrees that H.M. Ambassador in Berne may be instructed in the terms suggested in paragraph 6 of the minute.

A. J. COLES

P. F. Ricketts, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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Prime Minister.

I am not sure that you have
finished dealing with this. Can I
 say that the instructions proposed in
paragraph 6 are acceptable?

A. J. C. "15"



PM/84/76

PRIME MINISTERPrime Minister.

Content will be instructions
in para. 6?

Yes ✓ A.C. 9/3.

Relations with Argentina

1. You will have seen the telegrams reporting the latest exchanges between the Argentines and the Swiss Protecting Power. These followed the message conveyed to the Argentine Foreign Minister by the Swiss Ambassador on our behalf on 6 April, in which we said unambiguously that whilst we were prepared to discuss the progressive normalisation of relations, sovereignty must be excluded from the talks.
2. The Argentine Foreign Minister subsequently arranged to meet the Swiss State Secretary, Brunner, in Paris on 24 April to discuss the Argentine response to our message. He later confirmed to the Swiss that the proposals put forward by Brunner, on his own initiative at that meeting, were acceptable. The main elements of these Swiss proposals were as follows:-
 - (a) the Swiss authorities should issue an invitation, in terms previously agreed by the two parties, for a meeting to be arranged in Berne between the British and Argentine Ambassadors with appropriate support from capitals;
 - (b) these talks would be informal, with no fixed agenda, and would have the aim of establishing whether a basis existed to continue in the same or a different forum 'in order to settle certain problems' between us;
 - (c) there would be no prior declaration preceding the talks, nor would they be subject to preconditions.
3. We have since received through our Ambassador in Berne further elaboration of the Swiss ideas on the modalities of the kind of meeting they have proposed. The Swiss have also now sent us for comment a draft invitation from themselves to us and



and the Argentines to "talks about talks".

4. On the substance of the Swiss proposals, our preference for talks without a formal agenda has been met (paragraph 7(i) of my minute to you of 28 March) and the Argentines have backed off their earlier insistence on talks under UN auspices. But the Swiss proposals do not incorporate our suggestion that both sides should state their position on sovereignty before and quite separately from any talks between us about normalising relations. The proposal that talks should take place without preconditions leaves it open to the Argentines to introduce the subject of sovereignty if they judged it tactically advantageous to do so. That is clearly unacceptable. On the other hand, an apparently arbitrary rejection of talks could prejudice the support and sympathy we have received hitherto from our partners and allies - and would not be in line with our own objective. I believe that we must therefore continue to work for the kind of talks that we have in mind. But we must take steps to ensure that they only proceed on terms which are clearly understood and acceptable to us, along the lines we have already agreed and sought to lay down.

5. The Swiss role in all this has not been as helpful as they intended. They have moved, or been manoeuvred, from a position of Protecting Power, acting on our behalf and in accordance with our instructions, to one closer to that of an intermediary. In their efforts to achieve progress they have lost sight of the need to safeguard our position on refusing to discuss sovereignty. Our Ambassador in Berne has already explained that for practical reasons we cannot meet the deadlines proposed. The request for comments on the draft invitation now provides us with an opportunity to reiterate that there are fundamental elements in our position which cannot be glossed over.

6. I propose therefore to instruct HM Ambassador in Berne along the following lines. He should ask the Swiss to make clear to the Argentines that we are not prepared to discuss sovereignty at any stage in any series of talks that take place and that we could not,



therefore, accept that any talks should be held explicitly without preconditions. However, he would also ask the Swiss to explain that we were not asking the Argentines publicly to renounce their claim, as they appear to believe. The Swiss could remind the Argentines that our proposals for a prior statement, if that is what the Argentines wished, fully accommodates the Argentine Government's need to preserve its position domestically. But they would again emphasise that, if despite the clear understanding beforehand, the Argentines persisted in raising the subject once we had embarked on talks at any level, those talks would cease.

7. This position is not without risks as we have recognised all along. If the Argentines were to reject our offer of separate statements on sovereignty, they might well leak the Swiss proposals in the hope of portraying us as inflexible in the face of an ostensibly reasonable offer. But our proposals are intended to provide a way of putting the sovereignty issue on one side: of getting the talks underway; and of keeping the risks to a minimum that they will be broken off in mid-stream because the Argentines raise sovereignty. On this basis our position is the right way of reconciling the Argentine need to show that sovereignty has not been excluded altogether, and our absolute requirement that it should not be raised in these talks.

GEOFFREY HOWE

- 9 MAY 1984

