



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

28 April 1982

A J Coles Esq
10 DOWNING STREET*Prime Minister has seen**ML 28.
4**Dear John,*

I wanted to write to you immediately about the handling of Washington tel no 1472 about which the Prime Minister quite rightly complained at this morning's meeting of OD(SA). I have looked into what happened and it is clear that the fact that the telegram was not advanced to you was simply due to human error for which I apologize, and for which I must accept ultimate responsibility. It is extremely unfortunate that the error should have happened in relation to this particular telegram.

You will want the facts. All timings are expressed in British Summer Time. The telegram left Washington at 0906 hours yesterday, 27 April. It was received in the FCO signals office at 1109 and a copy sent immediately to our Emergency Unit for immediate action. Advance copies were despatched at 1130. The final 'printed-up' version was ready by 1355 when the wider distribution was made. Most recipients outside the FCO would have received this final version of the telegram by Home Service messenger in the course of the afternoon, though you at Number 10 and other priority addressees should have received your advance copy at about 1130 in the morning.

As I have said, it was simple human error which failed us in this instance. The telegram distributor concerned, who has only just returned from a tour of duty overseas, intended (rightly) to limit distribution of this secret telegram in the first instance to those who had received the telegram to which it referred i.e. Washington tel no 1471. That telegram was advanced to you. He thus erred seriously in omitting to include No 10 among the advance recipients of Washington tel no 1472.



It was not immediately clear from the introductory paragraph of Washington tel no 1472 that the text was being formally presented to us. The State Department were described as having "given us the text of the US proposal" which had been conveyed to the Argentines. It was clearly based on the document which the Foreign Secretary brought back from Washington following his discussions with Mr Haig there. Since however there were a number of significant changes, the Emergency Unit took immediate steps, in agreement with the Cabinet Office, to have this latest version circulated for this morning's meeting as OD(SA)(82)31. I do not think myself that on this point the Prime Minister can be said to have misled the House yesterday.

All this said, however, I greatly regret that such a mistake occurred. I hope you will give my personal apologies to the Prime Minister. I have already made alterations to our present procedures and my office among others will keep a close eye on the telegram distributions in future.

James Cook
Antony

Antony Acland



128 APR 1982

