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US ARMS SALES TO ARGENTINA

SECRETARY OF STATE'S MESSAGE TO MR SHULTZ, 22 NOVEMBER 1985

'Dear George,

I understand that there were useful discussions on US policy in the security field towards Argentina in the course of the recent Pol/Mil talks in London. We appreciate the thorough way in which you are carrying out your commitment to consult us on this issue. It is a commitment we value very highly.

On developments in Argentina, we understand your satisfaction at the way Alfonsin appears to be developing, not least on the economic front. His determination gives some hope that democracy there may at last take root, although it will clearly be a very tender plant for a long time.

From the start, the Prime Minister and I and other Ministerial colleagues have publicly supported the efforts of Alfonsin and his Government to consolidate democracy in Argentina. We shall continue to do so. We have as you know been working to achieve more normal relations between Britain and Argentina by making numerous practical proposals in particular in the economic and commercial field. But the response from the Argentine Government has so far been very disappointing.

We understand how sensitive an issue the Falklands is in Argentina, and that President Alfonsin has to proceed with caution. But President Alfonsin's policy towards us has so far been unco-operative. We therefore remain very cautious in our assessment of Argentine intentions towards the Falklands in anything other than the short term. Alfonsin told the German press in September that the British 'must vacate the Islands'. Until Alfonsin and his successors have come to terms with the reality of the situation created in the Islands, no less than in Britain, by the conflict in 1982, we must remain wary.

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SECRET



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That is the background against which we have to assess the supply by the US Government of military equipment that could enhance the capability of the Argentine armed forces to strike again at the Islands if and when they are so minded. The Prime Minister has raised this on several occasions with the President, and you and I have discussed this as well. So I know you have our concerns very much in mind. But I thought it worth emphasising again that a decision to release such equipment to Argentina would be received here with the utmost dismay. I have in mind in particular Skyhawk aircraft, although certain other equipment would give rise to equal concern. A further concern is that sales by you would encourage other Allies to do likewise.

The Prime Minister and I therefore very much hope that in developing a closer security relationship with Argentina you will keep our own security requirements at the top of you minds.

Yours sincerely,

Geoffrey¹⁴

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