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## AN ALLY NOT AN UMPIRE

Mr Haig's spectacular inter-continental shuttle makes it clear that the United States administration is giving top priority to the resolution of the Falkland Islands crisis. Britain has welcomed that, since the United States is both our ally and in a better position than any other state to exercise leverage over Argentina. But there have, perhaps inevitably, been some misgivings about the spirit in which the administration approaches the crisis. Some British commentators have even gone so far as to suggest there could have been collusion between the United States and Argentina before the invasion.

That is a wild accusation, unsupported by any evidence. But it is true that there has been an ambivalence in the American response to the crisis that contrasts with the impressive backing that Britain has now received from the other members of the European Community. The United States has not been unfriendly to the British case. It supported Britain in the United Nations and it is concentrating on seeking an acceptable settlement. But in doing so it has been trying hard to preserve its friendship with Argentina as well. So its public reaction has been as even-handed as possible. It has refrained from giving the unequivocal support to Britain that would be justified both on the grounds of friendship and on the merits of the case.

The reasons for this are that the United States has interests in this crisis which differ from those of Britain or Argentina; and that it believes it has a distinctive role to play partly because of its power and influence and partly because of those special interests. The American administration is afraid of the dispute over the Falklands further undermining stability in Central America. It had looked upon Argentina as a potential partner in Latin

America and would like still to be able to do so. In particular it wants to avoid the Rio Treaty being invoked against the introduction of forces from outside the continent into the American hemisphere.

If it comes to that point, the United States will not agree to the Treaty being applied in this instance. Whenever it is forced to make a critical choice between Britain and Argentina, the administration will not be so even-handed as it appears. But it would be reluctant to do anything that would weaken the authority of the Rio Treaty, which it sees as a valuable instrument against any intrusion of Soviet forces into the American hemisphere. The United States is extremely anxious therefore to prevent the treaty being invoked, which gives added urgency to its activities as a mediator.

It believes that it is more likely to be successful in this role if it has not adopted the public posture of a partisan. There is some force in this argument. The United States is the only country with the authority to act as a mediator, and there is value in having an honest broker if it can bring about a settlement that is consistent with the interests both of Britain and of the Falkland Islanders themselves. In so far as a certain diplomatic blandness is required to enable the United States to play this role it is reasonable enough.

But there are two dangers. The United States must not make the mistake of which it has sometimes with justice accused its European allies of putting local convenience above broader international consideration. Just as it was wrong for a number of European countries to respond feebly to the Soviet aggression in Afghanistan, for fear of disturbing detente in Europe, so it would be unforgivable now for the United States to allow its

conduct over the Falklands to be governed by its preoccupation with Central America. A degree of circumspection is necessary in a mediator. But for the United States to go beyond that simply in order to protect its own local interests would not be consistent with the obligations which it owes to Britain as an ally or with its own broader purposes in the world. In its activities as a mediator it must not be so hungry for a speedy settlement that it fails to take full account of the merits of the issue.

The second danger is that the American administration may fail to think sufficiently of the effect that its conduct in this crisis will have upon the future of the Atlantic Alliance. This is partly a matter of the impression that it creates as a mediator and partly of what it will do if mediation fails. It will be a tragedy if the United States allows itself to become so entwined in diplomatic niceties that it appears to be an unreliable ally.

This is what is disturbing much well-informed opinion in Washington, which is critical of the administration for failing to recognize the broader realities of the crisis. Britain has warmer friends in the United States than might be appreciated from the administration's public pronouncements. But it is inevitably the administration's attitude that is noticed in other countries, and there will be no winners in the Western world if the memory left by this conflict is of the United States keeping its distance while the European Community stood together. The Falkland Islands present issues that are important in themselves and the United States is naturally much concerned about Central America. But it will be no cause for congratulations if the price for resolving this dispute is to undermine confidence in the American commitment to its European partners.

## NEAR MISS AT GOSPORT

As HMS Invincible crept carefully through the narrows of Portsmouth Harbour last week, under many hundreds of eyes more or less wet with fears or memories, and hundreds of lenses blinking at least as busily, the Gosport ferry headed across the river on its regular half-mile navigation, right across the carrier's bows. After much agitated hooting from the great ship and foaming of reversed propellers, collision was averted by a margin of only a few yards, and the two captains went their way, both bright scarlet. Ferry-men have never been noted for deference or considerateness from the time of Charon onwards.

It is not hard to envisage the national and international headlines which would have followed if the two vessels had touched. Invincible would probably have been delayed for some hours or days: a ship with a suspect bow cannot be exposed to the South Atlantic winter. A trivial incident would have turned a majestic show of determination into an opportunity for the kind of rueful self-deprecation that the English do so well, and are

today so much in the habit of. In terms of such issues, many of us have grown used to the idea that we "but live where motley is worn", and now find ourselves unsure whether motley is still the right gear or not.

At that moment it was almost as important, diplomatically speaking, that the fleet should make a fine exit as that it should be fit for battle after crossing the Tropic of Capricorn. A mere hint of the banana-skin would have threatened the whole effect. This side of naval affairs is not trivial at all: many a warship has served usefully for its whole life without ever firing a gun in anger, by sauntering impressively here and there hinting at what its ordnance could do if it would, like a rook biding its time for the endgame.

As ships acquire more complex means of defence, they open themselves to more ways of going wrong. According to some reports, some such ignominious mishap has confined the Argentine aircraft carrier to port, as if the first day of this month would have been an apter name for it than the 25th of the next.

Big ships have always been vulnerable to little injuries. The Bismarck, which had the heels of most of the fleet pursuing her in 1941, would probably have got away if a lucky hit had not jammed her rudder askew and compelled her to sail in circles. The proverbial nail for want of which the battle was lost might just as well have been in a sloop's strake as in a horse-shoe.

On her way to sea the Invincible steamed close by the wreck of the Mary Rose, which was overwhelmed by just such a farcical triviality, when a breeze heeled her and sent the water in through gun-ports too eagerly opened for combat. Last week many of the crowds which watched the task-force sail stood on Henry VIII's South-sea Castle, where the king himself perhaps stood when he watched his flagship capsize. A few yards of water and more than 400 years separated the first purpose-built capital ship that ever sailed from Portsmouth to take a hand in the pursuit of diplomacy by other means, and the other, which we can hope may be the last that will ever need to.

## LETTERS TO

### Falklands: who will cooperate?

From the Governor of the Falkland Islands

Sir, I hope that you will allow me space to comment on Christopher Thomas's report of his interview with Mr Carlisle (April 10). Mr Carlisle spent a total of less than three months in the Falkland Islands. He recently bought a share in a local farm and it was common knowledge that he was at odds with his Islander partners and his Islander labour force.

After his first visit to the farm, the manager and most of the farm workers gave notice. He was scathing to me about their productivity, and said that, if he could not get Islanders to work for him, he would bring in Argentinians. In short, he was decidedly out of sympathy with the Islanders, and I cannot believe that he now accurately reflects Islander opinion.

As an ex-captain in the Rajputana Rifles, with active service on the North West Frontier, I am surprised that he appeared to measure the efficiency of the defending force by casualties sustained rather than casualties inflicted.

Incidentally, it was ironic that, at the time he was telling your reporter in Comodoro Rivadavia that we had not killed any Argentinians, the Argentine authorities in that same town were giving a burial with full military honours to the officer who led the attack on Government House.

Yours faithfully,  
REX HUNT,  
c/o Foreign and Commonwealth Office, SW1.

From Dr E. C. B. Corlett

Sir, The next few weeks will determine the immediate position of the Administration of the Falkland Islands. Thereafter, as your leader today (April 7) points out, the long term future of the Islands requires a stable, just and effective agreement.

The legality of Britain's claim to sovereignty over the Falkland Islands is almost certainly supportable internally and that of the Argentine tenuous. From several points of view — duty to the British inhabitants of the Islands, the future economic value of the continental shelf around the Falklands, particularly in terms of oil, fisheries and strategic considerations — Britain would be weak and foolish to relinquish the claim totally. We must restore our administration in the short term.

Nevertheless, it must be recognized that Argentina has a right to be seriously interested in the Islands and in the shelf around them and, furthermore, that the British record in respect of them is very poor.

Virtually nothing has been done to develop the Islands themselves, or their fisheries, or their kelp beds, and as for oil, in spite of Argentinian feelers for joint development, the Foreign Office has steadfastly refused to discuss the matter or to permit licensing.

I was in the Falkland Islands at the time of Lord Chalfont's visit in 1968 and saw the start of a campaign by the Foreign Office which has continued ever since then, to persuade the Falkland Islanders to join Argentina. The continuance of this campaign and the willingness to discuss a "dispute", when sovereignty of a British territory is clearly not

disputable, has encouraged the Argentine to escalate its claims to the point where it has taken military action.

Britain has done very little physically to develop the Islands on the one hand and has blown hot and cold over their sovereignty on the other. The present appalling situation is certainly partly the fault of Britain even if it is mainly that of the Argentine.

So, what of the future? I suggest that both Britain and Argentina, who are, after all, basically friends, should both retract somewhat from their present dug-in positions and each accommodate the other to some extent.

A treaty establishing joint sovereignty in perpetuum over the Falkland Islands and South Georgia, with a British administration on East Falklands at Stanley and Argentinian administration on the West Falklands, with joint nationality for all Islanders and with joint responsibility for communications, defence and development could well completely defuse the whole situation and allow friendly cooperation to develop.

If such a treaty left an element of competition particularly in development, then so be it. Maybe this could be just what is needed in the light of the British past record on the Islands.

Yours faithfully,  
EVAN C. B. CORLETT,  
Cottimans,  
Port-e-vullen,  
Ramsey,  
Isle of Man.  
April 7.

From the Reverend F. M. A. Payne

Sir, More than twenty years ago, British children at school in Buenos Aires were told "The Malvinas are British in the morning and Argentine in the afternoon."

This may suggest a possible resolution of the present Falkland Islands crisis. Could there not be a condominium of the Islands by both Britain and Argentina for, say, twelve years?

For the first six years and since the present population is largely British, there would be a British Governor and administrator but an Argentine deputy Governor and presence (to be agreed) to safeguard Argentine interests. There could also be an equal number of British and Argentine troops for security purposes.

After six years, the position would be reversed, an Argentine Governor and administration with a British deputy Governor and presence equal to that of the Argentine in the first six years, to safeguard remaining British interests.

After the twelve years (or however long an agreement might determine) the Islands could be wholly Argentine.

This would allow time for the Islanders to determine their own future in peace and freedom, and surely some sort of agreement like this would be better than battle joined, ships sunk, lives lost and bitterness prolonged.

Yours sincerely,  
MICHAEL PAYNE,  
Ecton House,  
Ecton,  
Northampton.  
April 7.