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TO IMMEDIATE FCO

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AND OTHER NATO POSTS, DUBLIN, UKREP BRUSSELS

FALKLAND ISLANDS

1. THERE HAS BEEN PUBLIC BEWILDERMENT IN AMERICA THAT SO APPARENTLY REMOTE A PROBLEM AS THE FALKLAND ISLANDS COULD SUDDENLY ASSUME SUCH GRAVITY, INVOLVING THE MOBILISATION OF OUR NAVAL FORCES AND THE RESIGNATION OF LORD CARRINGTON. I HAVE TODAY APPEARED ON SEVERAL RADIO AND TV PROGRAMMES, AND THIS MORNING CALLED ON VICE PRESIDENT BUSH, DEFENSE SECRETARY WEINBERGER, ZABLOCKI (CHAIRMAN OF THE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE), AND MICHEL (THE REPUBLICAN LEADER IN THE HOUSE). I HAVE SPOKEN BY TELEPHONE TO HOWARD BAKER (THE SENATE MAJORITY LEADER) WHO SAID HE WOULD BE SPEAKING TO HAIG AND WHO OFFERED TO SEND A MESSAGE TO THE ARGENTINIAN GOVERNMENT URGING RESTRAINT (BAKER WAS THERE RECENTLY) IF IT WOULD BE USEFUL TO US. I SHALL BE SEEING SPEAKER O'NEILL TOMORROW. IN EACH CASE, I EXPLAINED THE REASONS FOR LORD CARRINGTON'S RESIGNATION AND THE GOVERNMENT'S DETERMINATION TO UPHOLD THE RIGHTS OF THE PEOPLE OF THE FALKLAND ISLANDS. I MUST SAY I HAVE BEEN STRUCK BY HOW MYSTIFIED PEOPLE ARE AT THE REASONS FOR LORD CARRINGTON'S RESIGNATION WHICH THEY ALL ASSUME TO BE BECAUSE OF A DISAGREEMENT OVER POLICY. THERE IS ALSO CONSIDERABLE CONCERN AT THE PROSPECT OF MILITARY ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN OUR FORCES AND THOSE OF ARGENTINA AWARENESS OF THE STRONG ANTI-COLONIAL FEELING IN LATIN AMERICA WHICH TENDS TO SIDE WITH THE ARGENTINIANS BUT ALSO UNDERSTANDING THAT AGGRESSION CANNOT BE CONDONED. THE SENATE HAS ALREADY RISEN FOR ITS EASTER RECESS AND THE HOUSE IS ONLY IN PRO FORMA SESSION AND WILL GO INTO RECESS ON WEDNESDAY (7 APRIL). IT IS PROBABLY THEREFORE TOO LATE FOR CONGRESS TO ADOPT THE KIND OF RESOLUTION CALLING ON THE US GOVERNMENT NOT TO SUPPLY ARMS TO ARGENTINA OF WHICH CONGRESSMAN SOLARZ SPOKE TO ME ON SATURDAY (MY TELEGRAM NO 1108). HOWEVER, BOTH ZABLOCKI AND MICHEL HAVE PROMISED TO CONSIDER ISSUING STATEMENTS CONDEMNING ARGENTINE AGGRESSION.

2. I THINK IT WAS USEFUL TO EXPLAIN THE BACKGROUND TO BUSH WHO WAS NOT WELL INFORMED AND WAS GENERALLY SOMEWHAT CAVEY. I LEFT HIM IN NO DOUBT HOW VITAL TO US US REACTIONS WERE AND TOLD HIM THAT, REGARDLESS OF THE US POSITION ON SOVEREIGNTY, THEY COULD NOT BE NEUTRAL IN A CLEAR CASE OF OUTRIGHT AGGRESSION. THIS WAS NOT A COLONIAL ISSUE. WHAT WAS AT STAKE WERE THE RIGHTS OF SELF-DETERMINATION OF THE PEOPLE OF THE FALKLAND ISLANDS. BUSH SAID THIS WOULD BE USEFUL WHEN HE SAW THE PRESIDENT. HE HAD BEEN WITH THE PRESIDENT AT BREAKFAST AND WOULD BE SEEING HIM AGAIN.

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9  
see 10  
see 13  
see 17  
see 22

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3. LIKE BUSH, WEINBERGER HAD COMPLETELY FAILED TO UNDERSTAND THE REASONS FOR LORD CARRINGTON'S RESIGNATION AND WAS UNAWARE OF THE STRENGTH OF OPINION ON THE FALKLANDS ISSUE IN BRITAIN. I TOLD HIM THAT THE GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC WERE RESOLUTE AND HOW DAMAGING IT COULD BE IF STORIES, SUCH AS THAT WHICH APPEARED IN YESTERDAY'S WASHINGTON POST SUGGESTING THAT US NAVAL OPINION BELIEVED THAT THE UK MIGHT NOT HAVE THE CAPACITY TO MOUNT A SUCCESSFUL NAVAL OPERATION, WERE TO CONTINUE. WEINBERGER SAID HE WOULD DO WHAT HE COULD TO ENSURE THAT SUCH STORIES WERE NOT BASED ON ANYTHING SAID FROM THE PENTAGON. HIS OWN EXPERTS HAD TOLD HIM THAT THEY WERE IN NO DOUBT ABOUT THE STRENGTH OF OUR NAVAL CAPACITY. I SAID THAT WE WERE NOT LOOKING FOR A NAVAL ENGAGEMENT BUT THE ARGENTINIANS WERE UNLIKELY TO WITHDRAW UNLESS THEY KNEW WE MEANT BUSINESS, WHICH WE DID. THE SURE WAY TO GUARANTEE THAT THERE WOULD BE A BLOODY BATTLE WAS IF THERE WERE EXPRESSIONS OF DOUBT FROM THE US ABOUT OUR STRENGTH. WE HOPED THAT THE US WOULD BRING PRESSURE TO BEAR ON THE ARGENTINIANS TO WITHDRAW. WEINBERGER SAID THE PRESIDENT WAS HOPING TO USE US INVOLVEMENT IN LATIN AMERICA TO FIND A WAY TO HELP RESOLVE THE ISSUE.

4. WEINBERGER TOLD ME THAT HE HAD NOT THE FAINTEST INKLING IN ADVANCE THAT AN ARGENTINE ATTACK ON THE FALKLANDS WAS IN PREPARATION.

HENDERSON

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