



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

20 December 1983

Dear John,

Argentina/Falklands: Next steps with the Alfonsin Government

There was discussion in Cabinet on 15 December about exploring through the Swiss the possible resumption of some official contact with Argentina.

The Foreign Secretary believes that we need to follow up the Prime Minister's exchange of messages with President Alfonsin as soon as possible. Hopes of progress are quite widespread. Sir Geoffrey thinks it important to avoid creating any exaggerated expectations. But there will be criticism at home and abroad if we appear to hesitate over this opportunity to move towards more normal relations - at the same time, of course, as standing firmly by our commitments to the Islanders.

// Sir Geoffrey therefore proposes to put in hand an approach by the Swiss to the Argentines to establish acceptable terms of reference for talks at official level about means of making progress in a number of areas. I enclose drafts of the telegrams which Sir Geoffrey proposes to send to HM Ambassador in Berne. We of course have in mind, with reference to paragraph 3f of the second draft telegram, the Prime Minister's comment in her summing-up in Cabinet last week that a formal cessation of hostilities must be the pre-condition for any resumption of full diplomatic relations. There are various stages, stopping well short of the resumption of full diplomatic relations, which could be examined in talks about normalisation.

Sir Geoffrey intends that we should steer the Argentines firmly away from "Secret" talks. We do not propose to publicise our approach to the Swiss, though Sir Geoffrey thinks we should tell our main Allies and partners of our action. He proposes that our line for use in Parliament and in public when asked, should be that following the exchange of messages, we are indeed exploring realistic means of moving towards a more normal relationship with Argentina, but decline to give details. Any talks that

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eventually take place with the Argentines themselves could be presented in a broadly similar way, although we could then describe, as indeed we have already done, the broad areas in which we think it realistic to contemplate early progress. We could also place additional emphasis on the talks being without prejudice to our own views and position on sovereignty.

We see no need to consult the Falkland Islands' Councils in advance since our approach is consistent with public statements by Ministers and the Islanders' interests are fully protected. We did, as you know, inform Sir Rex Hunt in advance of the Prime Minister's message to Alfonsin and asked him to reassure the Islanders that we stand as firmly as ever by our commitments to them. We propose to keep him closely informed of the developments contained in these telegrams accordingly.

Yours ever,

Peter Ricketts

(P F Ricketts)  
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq  
10 Downing Street