

TMP

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

1 June 1982

John Holmes

British Antarctic Survey

Dr. Ady and Dr. Swithinbank called on the Prime Minister this evening. The invitation to them to do so stemmed from Mrs. Thatcher's meeting last Friday with Lord Shackleton and Lord Buxton who suggested that a conversation with representatives of BAS could be enlightening.

I enclose a summary record of the conversation.

I am copying this letter and enclosure to the Private Secretaries of the members of OD(SA) and to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

John Holmes
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John Holmes, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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SUBJECT

RECORD OF MEETING BETWEEN DR. ADY AND DR. SWITHINBANK OF THE
BRITISH ANTARCTIC SURVEY, AT 1800 HOURS ON TUESDAY, 1 JUNE 1982,
10 DOWNING STREET.

The Prime Minister said that she would be most grateful for views on the future development of the Falkland Islands, their dependencies and the British Antarctic territory. Were the geological structures promising? Did natural resources offer development prospects. Would the wildlife of the area be of interest to tourists? She wondered whether the Government had consulted BAS sufficiently in recent weeks.

Dr. Ady said that BAS had been in close touch with MOD, though Dr. Swithinbank thought that contact had not been at a sufficiently high level for discussion of policy issues.

Dr. Ady then explained that BAS had been operating continuously since 1944 in the Antarctic. We were the only country which had done so. We knowled the world in Antarctic science. Other countries frequently sought our advice. Dr. Swithinbank said that it was the hope of all those interested in the scientific development of Antarctica that scientific productivity would be the criterion for their activities. All BAS bases had been established according to scientific criteria. But no research was being carried out on behalf of the Government at present. He was now writing a paper describing the research which BAS should try to conduct in the future. The terms of reference of BAS did not of course include the Falkland Islands. He then showed the Prime Minister some recent landsat photographs of the area and confirmed, in answer to the Prime Minister's question, that Argentina received these photographs direct. BAS possessed the largest collection of satellite pictures of the Antarctic on this side of the Atlantic. They had been the first organisation in the world to use such photographs to make a series of detailed maps of the area. The situation in Antarctica was very different from that of the Falkland

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- 2 -

Islands. In Antarctica a number of countries had claims. We like others had in effect ceded part of our Sovereignty in the Antarctic Treaty. This had been a conspicuous success in maintaining the peace for 20 years. Argentina's motive in maintaining its presence in the area seemed to be almost entirely military. But it was to some extent restrained from pursuing its claims by the prospect of opposition from the United States, the Soviet Union and others. The Treaty arrangements had worked well but the difficult problems lay ahead. For the future, he would like to see an international authority regulating mineral exploration and exploitation. Most of the Treaty powers had a similar desire but the emotional attraction to Argentina of territory as such could create difficulties for the future. Argentina wished to extend its territorial sovereignty as far as it could in the area and, with the military in charge, anything could happen.

Dr. Ady informed the Prime Minister that the FCO were preparing a paper on the future of the Treaty arrangements. He found it a very good document.

He then referred to Lord Shackleton's excellent report on the Falkland Islands. The Prime Minister said that she had recently asked Lord Shackleton to up-date it. What were the prospects for oil in the area? Dr. Ady said that some of the surveys had not been very promising but natural gas had been discovered about half-way between the Falkland Islands and Patagonia. He thought it would be worthwhile arranging for the geophysics of the area to be properly researched and for a hole to be drilled. There were possibilities of oil development around South Georgia too. But commercial companies would not quickly become involved because of the political instability and uncertainty about the median line between Argentina and the Falkland Islands. The BAS had been looking at the possibilities of developing krill around South Georgia for some years. The Russians, Poles and others had been harvesting krill but we had not. The BAS was now doing a thorough study of the life-cycle to provide a proper basis for

/future harvesting.

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- 3 -

future harvesting. Dr. Swithinbank thought that some 50 million tons of krill could be harvested each year and that this was a sustainable yield. But as regards the Falkland Islands, they could never support a large number of people because the land was not fertile. Argentine hostility towards the Islands would persist for a very long time. There must be some guarantor, besides ourselves, of its defence. Taking up an earlier remark of the Prime Minister, he expressed relief that she did not envisage extending the Treaty arrangements of Antarctica to the Falkland Islands. This could cause chaos in Antarctica by importing into the area the UK/Argentine adversarial relationship.

Dr. Ady said that one of the problems of BAS was tele-communications. As soon as Port Stanley had been taken, the normal BAS communication channel via Cable and Wireless had ceased. They would not wish to depend on Cable and Wireless in the future and were hoping to establish direct satellite communication. Dr. Swithinbank said that the main significance of the Falkland Islands for the work of the BAS lay in the Port Stanley airstrip. But there could be an all-weather 10,000 ft airstrip on South Georgia (the Ministry of Defence had all the necessary information about this).

The Prime Minister enquired whether Argentina had made a distinctive scientific contribution. Dr. Ady replied that it had not done so in the field of Antarctic research - this was in the hands of the military who were in Antarctica for their own purposes.

The Prime Minister said that she would like to be able to draw President Reagan's attention to the value of the scientific research which was being carried out in Antarctica. Dr. Swithinbank suggested that she should mention Dr. Frank Williamson, the Chief Scientist at the Division of Polar Programmes at the National Science Foundation. He would certainly speak well of BAS. Another American who knew their work was Dr. L.M. Gould, the former President of Carleton College.

/ Dr. Ady

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- 4 -

Dr. Ady recalled that Argentine territorial ambitions in the area were deeply rooted. He had personally been involved in an incident in 1952 when the Argentines had fired at a BAS base on the northern tip of the British Antarctic territory.

Dr. Swithinbank said that the BAS had a particular need for high altitude photography of the whole area, i.e. photographs taken from up to 45,000 ft. This would be the next step in mapping the Antarctic peninsula. He would be most grateful for any assistance which the MOD could offer.

The Prime Minister enquired whether the Falkland Islands could provide a base for the future International Antarctic Authority. Dr. Swithinbank said such an Authority would be necessary when mineral exploration commenced. The Falkland Islands might be a possibility as a base but the problem was whether Argentine agreement could be secured.

Finally, Dr. Ady said that he thought fresh planning was necessary for the future of the BAS. At the moment its activities were on a declining curve. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office were preparing a paper on the subject.

A. J. C.

1 June 1982

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