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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

5 May 1982

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f.c.

*Dear John,*

The Prime Minister has asked for advice on a request - channelled, I understand, through Lord Thomas of Swynnerton - that she should receive Dr Rafael Caldera, the former President of Venezuela, to discuss the Falkland Islands.

I enclose a personality note on Dr Caldera. He is a founder of COPEI, the ruling Christian Democrat (centre right) party in Venezuela. He was President between 1969 and 1974 and has retained a leading influence in his party. He will be the COPEI candidate in the next Presidential elections in 1983. Dr Caldera is thus a figure of importance in Venezuelan politics. He has considerable political stature in Latin American with a reputation for moderation and breadth of vision.

The present Venezuelan Government under President Herrera have throughout the Falklands crisis taken a firmly pro-Argentine position, strongly supporting the Argentine sovereignty claim and increasingly hostile to the UK. In this they have been conditioned by their own sovereignty claim against Guyana, on which Venezuelan emotions run high. Although in Venezuela rhetoric often counts more than action, it is conceivable that, if conflict continues to develop, Venezuela may provide military assistance to Argentina and could take action against our own diplomatic and economic relations with them. Against this background it is unlikely that any proposals which Dr Caldera may bring will be constructive from our point of view.

However, Dr Caldera has not so far as we are aware yet taken a public position on the Falklands crisis himself. He may conceivably be thinking of casting himself in a mediatory role with an eye to the forthcoming Presidential elections. We would not want to encourage this. There is however no advantage to us in antagonising the Venezuelans unnecessarily and a refusal to see Dr Caldera would inevitably be seen as a rebuff which might only harden Venezuelan attitudes. Venezuela will remain an important market for us in the region and we have in recent years put a good deal of effort into strengthening our political relations and capitalising on the Venezuelan Government's generally sensible and constructive approach to Central American and Caribbean security.

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Our recommendation is therefore that the Prime Minister should agree to receive Dr Caldera. It would be sufficient if the Prime Minister were to take note of whatever suggestions Dr Caldera might make and to use the opportunity to set our own views on the Argentine invasion. It would also be helpful for Dr Caldera to be reminded that, despite present difficulties, we wish to preserve our good relations with Venezuela and with the region.

*Yours ever*

(J E Holmes)  
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq  
10 Downing Street

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CALDERA, DR RAFAEL

President of Venezuela 1969-74.

Born 1916 in Yaracuy; studied law at the Central University and has been active in politics since the age of eighteen.

Member of Congress 1941-44, helped to found COPEI, in 1946, and was re-elected to Congress 1946-47. After Perez Jimenez came to power (1950) his party disintegrated. Some of the party supported Perez Jimenez; Caldera opposed him and was imprisoned.

COPEI presidential candidate 1958; won just under 20 per cent of the votes. Became Deputy and President of the Chamber of Deputies while COPEI was in coalition with AD. Presidential candidate 1963; this time came second with a slightly increased vote. From 1963-68 COPEI was the chief opposition party and he held no Government post.

Elected President 1968 with 32 per cent of the vote. As President he showed himself the undisputed leader of his party (whose Secretary General he had been since its foundation in 1946), but was greatly limited by lack of majority in Congress and a consequent lack of access to funds. An arrangement between COPEI and the leading opposition party, AD, gave Caldera and the Government a freer hand to push through a number of major items of legislation in 1970. At the end of 1970 this collaboration broke down and the tactics of the opposition thereafter forced Caldera to adopt a strong nationalistic attitude towards economic matters, particularly with regard to the foreign oil companies. Made a state visit to the United States in June 1970, where he made a favourable impression; gave full backing to Calvani (Foreign Minister) over the signing of the Protocol of Port of Spain freezing the Guyana border dispute; renewed diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Regarded as a good President but with a poor team.

He remains the most important figure in COPEI. From the 1940s until his election to the Presidency he taught politics at the Central University.

He has a good political pressure, although his opponents question whether there is anything behind it. He also speaks and writes extremely well, but is somewhat prolix. Has a number of books to his credit, including a biography of Simon Bolivar. In June 1974 he led the Venezuelan delegation to the unveiling of the Bolivar statue in London, and later in the same year visited the UK again to inaugurate the Andres Bello chair at Oxford University. Visited the UN early in 1979 and was elected President of the IPU during the IPU Conference held in Caracas in September 1979. Since the election of President Herrera there has been an undercurrent of confrontation between the party's two 'Presidents', which Caldera has increasingly brought into the open. Has already made it clear that he is a Presidential Candidate for 1983, though is attempting to widen his base beyond COPEI.

Married; six children. Speaks English well.