

DANGER : ARGENTINE AND CENTRAL AMERICA

Self-typed 18/11/83 Summary and Conclusions.

US arms sales to the Argentine, and the political legitimisation which will accompany such sales willy nilly, would present serious dangers for the future of the Thatcher government, and of the survival of Conservative Government at all, within the time-space of a few years. It is therefore vital that US arms sales and political legitimisation be prevented. This will require, among other things, Britain's emergence as an active ally of the United States in the Caribbean Basin. British aid to the US effort to chop of the tentacles of Soviet incursion into the new world would be principally political and diplomatic, backed by presentation in the USA of what we are doing for them.

Nothing need to be done towards that end which is not intrinsically justified in the interests of the Atlantic Alliance.

The physical resources needed for such a policy are infinitesimal, particularly when compared with the large sums doled out in economic aid and "long-term credits" for no real political return, i.e. to India which works hand in glove with the Soviet Union against the democracies.

The only military commitments would be the undertaking to keep the force in Belize for so long as is necessary, not only to deter Guatemalan incursions, but also to stop the country falling into Cuban hands, which would have tragic consequences for Central America and for the Western Alliance.

The main contribution would be diplomatic and political support in world fora, in Europe and in the Caribbean basin itself, and in bringing home to American public opinion the value of that support.

1) The dangers of re-armed Argentine.

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The Argentinian political classes are not reconciled to their defeat in the Falklands battle. For them, the Falklands are infinitely more important than they are intrinsically for Britain. But as we know, the history of Britain's recent involvement in the Falklands, and its political effects is such that a defeat and humiliating outcome for Britain would have tragic consequences for the position of the Prime Minister, would split and demoralise the Conservative Party, and could well lead to a return of a government of the unreformed left.

Though everyone favours a negotiated solution, no solution has yet even dimly been envisaged which could square circles and produce an accord acceptable to the Argentinians and which would not be seen by Englishmen as giving up Islands which their bolsiders had died for only a few years previously, and whose retention had redounded to Mrs. Thatcher's glory. The Argentinians in particular

are not interested in compromise - even were one conceivable - but in self-vindication.

3       The elections make no difference. It was always a mistake to believe our own propoganda and take it for granted that democracies are necessarily more pacific and reasonable than dictatorships. History - past and contemporary - gives no justificastion for this view. Indeed, on balance, experience of the past two centuries suggests that regmes susceptible to popular opinion are more prone to military adventures than authoritarian regimes guided by raison d'etat.

      The British position in the Islands is vulnerable. The Argentinians are capable of using modern arms; what they lack is operation planning and the ability to match weapons systems to tactical need. Were this provided, they could make the Falklands untenable, since Britain lacks the resources to protect an 8,000 mile sea and air lane. What Britain also lacks is deterrent power, i.e. to inflict such heavy damage on the Argentine's mainland bases or major cities and routes as to maintain a balance of fear.

      Politically, change has been against Britain. Whereas, following elections, the Argentine is temporarily more united politically, in Britain the Labour Party has abandoned any commitments to bi-partisanship and patriotism in its foreign policies, and would exploit renewed conflict with the Argentine for wholly partisan purposes with the use of leftwing rhetoric, as Benn did during the first Falkalands Battle in 1982. The Conservative Party was never fully united over the issue, and if the going got tough many would either cut and run for cover or use the situaton for anti-Thatcher purposes.

( I can elaborate on the military or political problems should you wish. )

2) American "Hemispheric obsession".

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The prospect of Neil Kinnock in Number Ten should of itself be sufficiently grim to deter the Americans from giving the Argentinians arms and legitimacy. But their thinking is dominated by developments in the Caribbean and seen through the prism of "hemispherism".

They will look for their allies where they can find them, on the unspoken assumption that if they lose the battle of the Caribbean Basin, Europe will become indefensible anyway.

Were we to emerge as US allies in their struggle against Soviet-Cuban penetration, they would downgrade relations with Argentina and its close allies correspondingly. But if we are seen to be waverers and critics, the hemispherists will argue that they are antagonising Latin Americans for no reason in order to support unreliable friends. The fact that Britain cannot count on much European support on this matter makes us more vulnerable to realpolitik arguments.

What does the Reagan Government need from us?

Primarily legitimation in the eyes of sections of the American political classes. It is argued by opponents of Reagan's stand against Soviet penetration that he is isolating the US from its allies. Even though some who use the arguments are not in favour of Atlantic defence either, it is a useful stick with which to beat Reagan.

Were Britain to recognise implicitly that defence of the American continent against Soviet penetration is as much part of European security as defence of the Elbe, this would have considerable influence on Congress. Given Britain's present standing, it would also have an impact on European opinion. The Germans would be influenced. Mitterand would think twice against indulging his radical chic wife's vapid taste for the vicarious thrills of guerrilla warfare in romantic lands.

Britain is still a Caribbean power, albeit in the process of withdrawal. Together with the Dutch, it could provide regional legitimation for American hemispheric defence.

Britain can also help with small naval and military units for emergency operations

6 In Belize, Price is totally unreliable. His mini-state is unable to organise itself effectively, to create a defence force, an economy, agriculture, a national community. The Cubans have been buying their way in in order to use Belize as a staging post for drug-running into the USA.

Were the British to leave under anything like present circumstance, without prior agreement with the Guatemalans for joint defence of the country, the Cubans could exploit ethnic animosities and the cupidity of the ruling party to gain a foothold, set up a puppet government, and then Grenadianise the country. They would then have a base of operations from which to attack Guatemala and Honduras from the flank and rear with increased guerrilla activity, and infiltrate into Mexico, which is vulnerable thanks to its discredited corrupt failed government, unemployment, poverty and blatant inequality worse than anywhere else in the region.

Were we to press the Belize government to accept a reasonable compromise with the Guatemalans ( who in the past have been their own worst enemies, but have recently shown more sense ) so that eventually the Guatemalans, and hence Americans, could share in responsibility for the country's defence, British troops could be withdrawn. Any threat of earlier withdrawal, given the Cuban menace can only be a nightmare for American strategic planners. Everyone from the Whitehouse and State downwards raise this with me spontaneously. They do not see why they can be expected to keep six divisions and two fleets in Europe for the sake of Atlantic defence if we cannot keep a battle group, a frigate and a squadron of harriers in Belize for exactly the same purpose.

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The Grenada victory has immensely strengthened Reagan's position, not least by showing the popularity of his move among Grenadians and other small nations. Success has a logic of its own. The initiative's enormous domestic popularity can best be demonstrated by the fact that Tip O'Neil, ranking Democrat in the House, and leader of the fight against Reagan, felt obliged to admit, a fortnight after denouncing the event in the strongest Kinnockian terms, that the incursion had been fully justified. For a politician to admit that he had been utterly wrong on a major issue of national defence is like having his eye teeth pulled without anesthetic. He did so only because of the coincidence of two factors: strength of popular feeling; and overwhelming evidence that the course had been correct.

But Reagan is not out of the wood yet. To bring peace to El Salvador and remove a serious threat to stability and socio-economic development in Honduras and Costa Rica, he must draw the teeth of the Communist government in Nicaragua, otherwise he will always be living on a knife-edge.

For an offensive against Nicaragua, he must up the ante in every sense, including maximising his political support domestically and abroad. So his need remains as great. If he wins, he tries to clear up the Islands, Suriname, etc., plans provisions for other emergencies, and then settles down to work to see what can be done to eradicate Cuba, the tapstock of evil.

The main point which emerges is that no plateau will be reached from which FCO officials will be able to record and accommodate happily the small change of diplomatic life. We are playing for big stakes, and the rules are what we make them.

In the half world of international politics, appearances and style count for much. A straightforward "nous sommes avec vous" and a token addition to the landing force, with readiness to take these people back to the folds of the commonwealth, would have been of inestimable value. I am not happy about the reasons given for doing otherwise.

Even at this late date, unequivocal expressions of full support for the US operation, based on improved information resulting from disclosures gathered by the landing, would radically alter the political climate in Washington. So would the feeling that Commonwealth Governors General now have someone who will look after them politically. No one relishes the role of sinner come to judgment, but there are worse ones in the calendar.

What is called for is the immense psychological satisfaction of knowing that as the US moves forward from faltering defence of the Western world, whose hinge is under attack in the Caribbean basin, to counter-attack, with the Iron Lady and her handmaidens as cheer-leaders.

One could then approach Messer or Reagan and propose a deal: "the Argentinians or us." You could then emphasize that any serious setback to Great Britain could compound the harm done to the Alliance's military and strategic fabric in the British politico-military ambience with its European implications, by outflanking the lines of communication and threatening the US's vital space. Harm is done by NATO by anything which pulls the rug from under Mrs. Thatcher.

There is a real and present danger of a slow step by step mutual rug pulling, a vicious circle. Hence the need to initiate a new deal in Anglo-American relations based on a Caribbean Basis alliance with broad perspectives.

There is no point in pointing out specific alibis of ours, e.g. supervision of the Salvadorean elections. Politicians think in terms of future favours, not past ones. Continued coherent political support in word and deed, especially word, is needed to convince the relevant policy-makers. This is a big job, to be taken with flair and without arrieres pensees.

Then there is the question of our unmanned embassies in San Alavador and Managua. No one outside of the Foreign Office believes that the reasons we have no resident ambassadors in two key-posts in the world, San Salvador and Managua, are financial. All Foreign Ministry expenditure is based on priorities. And no one will believe that even a nation of shop-keepers would give such low priority to two countries where skirmishes in the third world war are taking place as to make them less worthy of a resident ambassador than anywhere you care to name in Africa and other new countries where great issues are

not at stake.

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### The battle of New Delhi

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The Commonwealth is a millstone round our neck about which in the short term we can do little. It may have been force majeure which obliged us to throw Muzorewa to the wolves, I do not know. But Central America, read the Atlantic Alliance and US policy towards the Argentine is life and death to us. Can we afford to diminish our chances of a deal with the Americans, to reinforced the special relationship - now brittle at many edges - in order to curry favour with countries which are to a greater or lesser extent in the Soviet bloc ( which is what non-aligned means ) and which gave no positive value to defence of the free world?

Where arguments about international law are concerned, there are ample precedents for what the Americans did in Grenada. Home mentioned some. Rosalyn Huggins has many. The principle is that in this lawless world, the safety of free law-abiding nations must be given priority, and that under no circumstances should the interests of real live people be sacrificed to abstractions from textbook.

A strong stand in India will impress our allies, and dig a hole for the Argentinians.

These couple of thousand words (2480) are only the bare bones, at that, of what I have to say. They link with my other notes on the subject, dating back to the beginning of 1981, before Reagan was inaugurated, but when the US's Central American policy was beginning to veer under the influence of experience, Afghanistan and second thoughts. They include my notes of this month. Because British aid in the Caribbean Basin and regarding the Caribbean Basin is irreplaceable, our second thoughts would shine particularly brightly from amid the miasma of Ghandians and neutralist rhetoric. The PM could bounce back from New Delhi as bright as a new penny and make the new Caribbean Basin Alliance a reality before Xmas is with us. Bon voyage!

PS I enclose the chronology of events in Grenada leading up to the invasion. It seemed to me that all intelligence and operations levels must have known that invasion was on the cards to say the least. Surely the policy-making levels should have been warned of the need for contingency thinking, rather than having to do their conceptualisation when they were woken up at two in the morning. A propos, is anyone at that gathering going to have the gall to talk about the rule of law in international affairs?