

A.S.

15th April 1982

The Stable Door Remains Unlocked

Tessa has spoken to you on the telephone, but this is just a line to thank you very much for your Memorandum which Alexandra delivered here last evening.

I have handed your Memorandum to the Prime Minister.

IAN GOW

Alfred Sherman Esq

MEMO

April 1982

CONTENTS

THE STABLE DOOR REMAINS UNLOCKED

Foreign Office Deficiencies Threaten Government

1. Haig's Barbed Shuttlecock
2. Number Ten needs In-house Co-ordinated Defence  
and Foreign Policy Expertise.

April 1982

THE STABLE DOOR REMAINS UNLOCKEDForeign Office Deficiencies Threaten Government

1. Haig's Barbed Shuttlecock  
[Haig's visit can only work against a firm British stand]

It was immediately apparent to the more perceptive mediemen that Alexander Haig's self-appointed "mission" could only mean potential harm for Britain and benefit to the Argentine. Our reasoning was as follows:

\*Haig's intervention was primarily to achieve personal success to offset his poor record so far. He was more interested in the appearance of effectiveness than in the nature of its results.

\*Haig's style was an imitation of Kissinger's shuttle-diplomacy, though the circumstances are quite different.

a) Kissinger was dealing with two states- Israel and Egypt - both heavily dependent on the USA in a manner which neither Britain nor the Argentine are. Kissinger's need was to lead towards Egyptian acceptance of peaceful co-existence with Israel, at a price to be paid partly by Israel, partly by the US (in different kind). In the case of the Falklands, by contrast, the need is for the Argentinians to reverse their use of force to settle a claim of doubtful validity, which Britain has sought to meet by compromise.

\*Since it was Argentina which disrupted the status quo, the solution is for Argentina to withdraw. Haig need not go to Britain to achieve this. His only purpose in coming here could be to extract concession, i.e. reward Argentinian for aggression and increase pressures on our government (from within and without) to weaken our resolve.

\* There was no need for additional channels of communication between Argentina and the UK. Haig was bound to become a mediator-arbitrator, hence press Britain to weaken our stance.

Though we knew this, there were heavy Foreign Office pressures on the press to accept Haig's visit at his valuation. The pressures operated mainly through the diplomatic correspondents, who tend to be Foreign Office sycophants. One could feel the conflicting pressures inside several newspapers.

\*How far our government could press the White House to call off Haig is difficult to assess

from outside. But one factor is worth noting: the Haig-Reagan "even-handedness" is strongly condemned in the USA by both "liberals" and Conservatives. "Liberals" condemn it basically because they are against the military government, Conservative because they are pro-British and pro-NATO.

For Reagan to say that both the UK and Argentina are "friends" of the USA deliberately evades the point that Britain is an ally of the USA, in NATO, whereas the Argentine is not an ally, although linked by various vague hemispheric pacts.

I am not sure how far the strength and almost unique homogeneity of American feeling on this is understood in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Government; my sources play it back to me very strongly indeed.

2. Number Ten Needs In-House Co-Ordinated Defence and Foreign Policy Expertise.

The Falklands slip, and subsequent recognition that the Prime Minister had been given a totally unreliable appreciation of events - far inferior to that available to the media over the previous ten days - has serious implications for the structure of Government, shown to be flawed. Resignation by most of the Foreign Office ministerial team does nothing to remedy these underlying weaknesses. They are:

1) Serious deformation professionnelle in the Foreign Office, of which wilful misreading of Argentine intentions is only one example among many over the past fifty years. This deformation makes dependence on Foreign Office appreciation on almost any issue lethal, and even on their unsupervised implementation dangerous.

... / 2) The

2) a) The structure of Cabinet government leaves the Prime Minister absolutely dependent on the Foreign and Defence Secretaries for information as well as appreciations, even though they uncritically reflect the prejudices of their permanent staff. This leaves the Prime Minister politically vulnerable.

b) Given the present structure, the relative party standing and personalities of the two Secretaries of State goes a long way towards determining the balance between defence and foreign affairs appreciation, even though the latter often comes to mean diplomatic convenience rather than national interest, in any case. Given the snobbery in many Tory circles, favouring an old Etonian Lord, and the exaggerated respect paid to long experience (even if its results have always been catastrophic) the Prime Minister is deprived of adequate <sup>defence</sup> intelligence let alone a choice of different viewpoints based on available information.

.../ It

It follows that both in order to maintain adequate non-departmentalised sources of information and second opinions, and to balance defence and foreign considerations, the Prime Minister needs an in-house national-security unit to combine foreign and strategic appreciations. It is important that this be staffed by people who are independent, in the sense that their future advancement will not depend on senior officials in the two departments or the civil service generally, on the two secretaries of state or on senior defence officers. The alternative to this is the Prime Minister's dependence on the Carringtons of this world, who at best are little better than PRO's for the permanent officials, and, at worst, are intriguers into the bargain.

Such a unit would be answerable directly to the Prime Minister, but would have access to Cabinet Office and other official sources. For it to report to Cabinet Office would disarm it. There is no shortage of qualified people of a background which would make them generally acceptable, from both academe and high-ranking ex-servicemen.

FO Syndrome

Some time, it will be necessary to consider basic flaws in the FO and similar organisations in free countries, e.g. the State Department. I have long since moved on from criticism of the FO, to the view that a lifetime in the foreign service tends to warp judgement. Officials confuse diplomacy with foreign policy, though the former is just one way in which aspects of policy are negotiated when a negotiating situation exists. Their lifelong dealing with and mixing among diplomats from other lands, whose outward behaviour is superficially similar to theirs (though the states they represent treat foreign policy quite differently and regard its external niceties as "bourgeois" frills) distorts their vision.

Because they live their lives among other diplomats, they come to feel greater sympathy for them than for the common or garden people of their own country. However, common feeling with Soviet diplomats did not bring them nearer to grasping Soviet aims, but on the contrary, inhibits them from doing so. Isolation from the common people of this country, whom they regard as a potential threat to orderly diplomacy, leaves them politically unsensitive. Their feelings for our armed forces, on whom foreign affairs must be based, leave much to be desired.

My impression, after a lifetime's journalism, is of basically clever people, good at assembling facts, but tending to accept those which suit them, poor at conceptualising, weak at looking far ahead and envisaging the worst, reluctant to think the worst of our enemies, above all, intellectually hobbled by their cloistered monochrome state, incapable of contingency planning. [I draw to your attention an excellent letter in the Times of 14th April 1982 by Sir Peter Smithers]

As I see it, apart from difficulties created by the current climate of opinion, with its massochism and pro-totalitarianism, our problem is to break up this cloistered existence, bring men from the real world into the diplomatic service at all levels, including the very top, and moving diplomats out into other jobs - public and private, so that the FCO once again becomes part of Britain. It also entails having ministers who think for themselves, and do not get absorbed by the mystique thereby becoming PRO's for the FCO.

NB: The role of specialist advisors on foreign and defence matters is broadly parallel to arrangements envisaged in earlier communications of mine, regarding the structure of Prime Ministerial power and administration. I can amplify if needed.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Foreign policy failure in the Falklands

*From Sir Peter Smithers*

Sir, It would be regrettable if the ritual sacrifice of a covey of Foreign Office ministers were to give the impression that the fiasco in the Falkland Islands is mainly attributable to the victims. Of course the formal responsibility is theirs, but in fact the present crisis, in which Foreign Office policy has placed the Minister of Defence in an impossible position, is only the latest in an unbroken series of grave errors in foreign policy since the end of the second world war.

There are some 56 million inhabitants of Britain, whose security is the prime responsibility of the Ministry of Defence. Whatever may be said about the efficacy of the nuclear deterrent, it is quite certain that without it Britain would be open to Falklandization by the Soviet Union unless the United States chose to risk a nuclear war in its defence. The Minister of Defence has, quite rightly, refused to gamble the national safety upon the vagaries of American politics.

There are some 1,800 loyal subjects in the Falkland Islands. The problem there is of long standing. The state of opinion on the issue in the Argentine is well known. Dictators are endemic in Latin America and their ways are also well known. These conditions are certain to continue long after the present crisis has been settled.

Anybody unacquainted with the way in which British foreign policy is made might be excused for thinking that, if Britain was unable to respond to a permanent threat by stationing a permanent defence force in the area to defend 1,800 people many thousands of miles from bases without sacrificing the nuclear deterrent or damaging the national economy, it would have been better to explain this to the Falkland Islanders long ago. They could then have been given the choice between repatriation and settlement in Britain, or remaining to run the risks which have now, not surprisingly, materialized. The Foreign Office has thus saddled successive British Governments with a policy which they lacked the means to carry out and which, even given the means, would have been grossly disproportionate in the face of multiple and far greater dangers and responsibilities elsewhere.

The British Foreign Service is probably equalled in quality only by the French. How then did it happen that they failed to recognize either of the major revolutions in world politics since the end of the war — until it was too late? For a decade after 1949 those of us who suggested that our destiny might lie in Europe were regarded with kindly pity by ministers and by their professional advisers who should have known better. By 1972, when it was too late for Britain to join the European Community on advantageous terms, the very

same advisers had become naively enthusiastic about the project and apparently blind to the foreseeable problems which have since arisen.

After the Colonial Office had substantially liquidated the colonial empire, it was apparent that there was little or no political substance in the "new" Commonwealth. But to suggest this in the British delegation to the United Nations was to be thought a very silly fellow by the professionals. It is a curious fact that the very people who have a lifelong dedication to the study and formulation of foreign policy have consistently failed to perceive the world as it actually exists and, as a consequence, have failed to formulate an appropriate British foreign policy.

When taxed with the record, senior officials almost invariably respond by saying that their freedom of action is limited by the wishes of their political masters and the views of the electorate. This may be true, but the reasons for a consistent record of failure lie elsewhere. In the Foreign Office, or at the United Nations or even in Strasbourg, if one asked for a brief on a particular situation it would be of excellent quality. If a diplomatic operation had to be mounted, it would be impeccably performed. But if one asked for an explanation of the fundamental principles underlying British foreign policy in any of its aspects, one was met with a puzzled and mildly amused look, and a dose of that maddening pragmatism which Britain could afford in her period of predominant power.

In relatively minor matters it was this same absence of consistent theory and principles which caused the British Government in the European institutions to kick the ball through its own goal with depressing regularity.

The Falklands fiasco is but the latest instance of failure to apply fundamental principles to the making of foreign policy. Failure to note that policy must be formulated within the bounds of existing reality and of available resources has led to the "betrayal" of the Falkland Islanders, has dragged Britain into a dangerous situation damaging both to her diplomacy and her economy, and has gravely embarrassed our principal ally.

A reform of the Foreign Service is long overdue. Not a reform directed to an irrelevant "democratization", or a reduction to penury of the already modest lifestyle of our diplomats, but one directed to the weakness of the policy-making apparatus. No hecatombs of ministers will cure a persistent failure which owes more to institutions and habits of thought than to the shortcomings of individuals.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,  
PETER SMITHERS,  
6911 Vico Morcote,  
Switzerland.