



British Embassy
BUENOS AIRES

SUMMARY

A VALEDICTORY TO BUENOS AIRES

1. Previous relations with Argentina now lie in ruins. Are they worth building anew? (Paragraphs 1-3)
2. In fact Argentina is in herself, more important to us than generally realised. (Paragraphs 4 & 5)
3. Our relations with Argentina affect those with Latin America as a whole, and so with the United States of America and the European Community. (Paragraph 6)
4. There are risks meanwhile in being too wholly right. (Paragraphs 7-9)
5. An echo of Lord Trevelyan and a tribute to those who helped. (Paragraphs 10 and 11)



British Embassy
BUENOS AIRES

1 June, 1982

The Right Honourable
Francis Pym MC MP
etc etc etc
Foreign & Commonwealth Office
LONDON SW 1

Sir,

A VALEDICTORY TO BUENOS AIRES

It is a salutary discipline that, in his valedictory despatch, an Ambassador should sum up his mission and leave for his successor such wisdom as he can muster on what lies in store for British relations with the country to which he has been accredited. In my case, relinquishing now in London my charge as British Ambassador to the Argentine Republic, the discipline is a harsh one. I can only record that all I had laboured to achieve now lies in ruins: my successor, whenever he may be appointed, will have to find his own way as the fog of war clears. Perhaps, if he digs deep, he may find foundations laid by me and my predecessors. But the landmarks we left will have been swept away.

2. At present it may seem that this is no great matter. It is many years since relations with the Argentine Republic have been a high priority for Her Majesty's ministers or for the great British public. They have certainly not been

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regarded as worth any great effort to understand and - now they have gone obviously and devastatingly wrong - this could well be taken to show that any effort invested would have been wasted. What is the value of a relationship - or of the work put into building it - if the outcome is an underhand surprise attack? This seems to me a wholly legitimate question and the purpose of this despatch is to attempt an objective answer to it.

3. In fact I think there are three interrelated answers which can and should be given to show that the relationship was indeed worth cultivating and - now that it has been trampled into the ground - worth coaxing back into life.

4. In the first place Argentina, even now, is in reality a good deal more important to us than the British public has been led to realise. For those whose knowledge of Latin America is derived from the maps at the back of their pocket diaries, it is not easy to understand that there is a vast disparity in the real importance of the countries in the sub-continent. It is a tragedy that it has cost so much in blood and treasure for the man in the street to realise that Argentina is not just another "banana republic" - a tin pot country led by a tin pot dictator. This enormous fertile territory (the size of European NATO, including the whole of Turkey) with its developed markets, its high per capita income and great metropolitan capital is, for Western Europeans such as ourselves, more

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naturally "one of us" than perhaps any other state in Latin America. It is an important trading and cultural partner for nearly all our colleagues in the European Community and NATO, for the United States and also for Japan. It can reckon up its well-placed friends in a way which obliges even a country like the United Kingdom carefully to count our own when it comes to choosing between us.

5. This is moreover, a country where, if we cared, we could claim a special relationship unrivalled anywhere outside the Commonwealth. This is not disproved by the seizure of the Falkland Islands, any more than by the long-standing dispute between us over them. On the contrary it is a proof of our affinity that neither has impeded an irrepressible tendency towards good relations sustained more from Buenos Aires than from London. It is an irony that, during the few days that I remained as British Ambassador in Buenos Aires while the inhabitants of the Falklands were, to their shocked surprise, suddenly under Argentine rule, the British Community which I headed had - in its most restrictive definition - been increased by no more than 10%; in effective practice the British presence in Argentina had grown by some 2% at most. When it comes to calculating loyalty, the lives of this Community's sons and daughters sacrificed in the British cause during two World Wars had, by counting in the Islanders, been augmented by no greater proportion. The respect for

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things British which our Community has evoked in every section of Argentine society has been a capital on which we have drawn for years without acknowledgment. Even now it is as heart warming to hear of the countless expressions of regret and sympathy which members of the British Community (and my wife and I) continue to receive constantly from Argentine well-wishers as it is tempting to enjoy the alacrity with which the Argentines are jumping at the opportunity to cast the Americans rather than ourselves in the role of principal villain. In the late Twentieth Century there are not many places where the British are generally loved and respected. We should try to cultivate the few there are.

6. The second reason for such cultivation is, I think, that bad relations in Latin America cannot be confined to a bilateral base. Perhaps this is really true anywhere; but certainly, in the hemisphere, it is well to learn from the example of the United States that the Latin Americans are much more likely to play off each other against you than you are to play one off against another. We have too much Middle Eastern experience to mislead us. A deterioration of our relations with other Latin American countries because of our quarrel with Argentina is so much a current issue that I hesitate to comment on it in the vehicle of a despatch. But I do urge the corollary that, if good relations with Latin America in general are of importance to us (as obviously and in many contexts they are)

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then bad relations with Argentina are a luxury we can ill afford. One context which springs immediately to mind is that of Anglo-American relations; there is already only too clearly a limit to the elasticity of United States ties with Latin America involved in any attempt by us to draw her away to our side. Another applies to our fellow members of the European Community, even less happy to join us in a quarrel with Latin America than in one with Argentina alone.

7. The third reason for trying again, once the din of war is over, is the most sensitive and the least easy to express. It is that there are dangers inherent in the very righteousness of our present anger. It is not an idle paradox but, I believe, a basic truism of international relations that it is as perilous to confound too wholly in international debate as it is to defeat and humiliate too wholly in war. If we are troubled already with backsliding by our friends over the repudiation of Argentine aggression, this may be because Security Council Resolution 502 is more dogmatically condemnatory than, in their secret hearts, even those who supported it really feel - not because they deny the illegitimate use of force but because they are not altogether convinced that it was totally unprovoked. If our entitlement as an act of self-defence to retake by force what was forced from us evokes distaste, it is surely (behind all the talk of proportionality, etc) because the continuance of the Falklands as they were does not seem so wholly reasonable to others as it does to us.

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8. There is, of course, a corollary to this also - that if our rightness is not so absolute as it now seems to us, no more is Argentine wrongness. In war there are obvious advantages in seeing the enemy in two dimensions only. But in the aftermath of war (as also in its prevention) there are risks in oversimplification.

9. This is not the place, when there is to be a full enquiry, for me to rehearse the warnings sent home from my Embassy - during my own time and my predecessors' - before the final eruption of violence occurred. Suffice it to say that, had they been heeded it would have come as no surprise that Argentine pilots have shown outstanding courage, that the nation has rallied conspicuously round its military "oppressors", that talk of accepting high casualties to keep the "recuperated Malvinas" free from the invader has evoked not shock but enthusiasm in Argentina. There is a dark and violent side to Argentina and in the not so distant past the methods the military used to combat widespread terrorism far overstepped the bounds of the acceptable. As reports coming out of the Falklands are showing, Argentina has also its share of vandals, hooligans and roughs. But this is not the whole story, nor was the seizure of the islands a simple act of brigandage. If Galtieri had been no better than a Somoza, he would not have got decent men, like Nicanor Costa Mendez or Enrique Ros, to work for him. If Argentina's yearning for its "lost territory"

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had no respectable side, it would stir no chord of sympathy in a good democrat like President Belaunde Terry.

10. It must always be a humbling experience for a Head of Mission returned to London in circumstances such as mine to find how little his interpretations and explanations, his predictions and warnings, seem to have penetrated to those who have actually taken the decisions in his field. Inevitably in these circumstances my mind is carried back twenty-five years to the dark November of 1956 when I worked with Sir Humphrey Trevelyan (as he then was) in a cubby hole of the India Office curiously designated "H M Embassy Cairo in London". In my own displaced Embassy, which I now wind up, I have had to contest (ab initio and as though I had written nothing before) the portrayal of President Galtieri as a fascist dictator decreeing the invasion of the Falklands by an arbitrary act, much as Lord Trevelyan had then to contest the portrayal of Nasser's nationalisation of the Canal on the whim of a tin pot Hitler. Let me echo him also in urging that, just as there was more then to British relations with Egypt and the Arab world than the Suez crisis, so now there is more to British relations with Argentina and Latin America than the crisis over the Falklands.

11. I conclude, as is fitting, with a word of thanks to my staff and to my wife. It has required courage and cohesion in

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an Embassy to carry on and carry through these last difficult months. I have been fortunate in an outstanding group of home-based officers and a large and long-serving locally engaged staff whose devotion and loyalty have been beyond praise. But for the bursting of this festering sore of the Islands, our relations with Argentina would have been exceptional; as much as anything this was due to the enthusiasm and hard work put into the job by my own wife and the wives of my staff. We all worked hard. It is sad that now there is so little left to show.

12. I am sending copies of this despatch to Her Majesty's representatives at Montevideo, Brasilia, Santiago, Lima, Asuncion, La Paz and Washington, to the United Kingdom Permanent Representative to the United Nations and to the Governor of the Falkland Islands.

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Sir

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Anthony Williams', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Anthony Williams