

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

European Political Co-operation

Report of Special Meeting of the Political Committee

Brussels, 4 May, 1982

1. A special meeting of the Political Committee was convened at short notice by the Presidency, at the request of the UK, to discuss the Falkland Islands situation. Ireland was represented by Mr. P. MacKernan, Political Director, Mr. R. H. O'Toole, European Correspondent, and Mr. K. Dowling, Embassy, Brussels.
  
2. The Presidency opened the meeting and gave the floor to the UK. The UK (Bullard) said that he was grateful for the opportunity to continue briefing Britain's Community partners on developments in the crisis. Since the Ten last met, the most significant change had been in the position of the US and the positive impact of that change in attitude in the political, economic and military sense could not be understated. As regards the Argentine attitude there was every sign of confusion and competition in the decision-making process in Buenos Aires. The confusion was made worse by the continuing pressure of events and by the deliberate suppression of truth in order to conceal from the population the military losses Argentina had sustained. BBC broadcasts beamed to Latin America in Spanish had been jammed. Some civilian elements were in favour of the Haig proposals but the attitude of the military remained very hard. There was no readiness to respond to the pressure from many sources to seek a compromise and there was no evidence of any commitment to withdraw Argentine forces from the islands. All Argentine actions were consistent with a confused policy e.g. the diplomatic double-talk of Argentine Foreign Minister Costa - Mendez (Bullard described him as an "disinformation expert"), hesitant use of air and naval forces, reinforcement of troops on the Falkland Islands and insistence on a pre-determined outcome to negotiations. As regards military developments, partners would be well advised to rely on statements by the Ministry of Defence in London for accurate information and to pay little or no regard to Argentine sources.
  
3. Bullard went on to refer to the sinking of the Argentine cruiser ("the General Belgrano") as a tragedy. The ship was torpedoed on Sunday and was reported as sinking 24 hours later. The UK greatly regretted the casualties and destruction involved. However, the UK had never concealed from its partners from the beginning of the crisis that in despatching the task force there was always a determination to use legitimate force. To have sent the task force without such a willingness to use it would render it useless as a means of pressure on Argentina. In modern naval warfare

the first shot was the decisive one. Apart from the various announcements by the UK of first, a maritime exclusion zone, and later, a total exclusion zone, a warning had been issued on 23 April which made it clear that any approach by an Argentine naval vessel or aircraft or auxillary craft which could pose a threat to the security of the British fleet would encounter the appropriate response. The UK had reason to believe that the cruiser was on a mission which could pose such a threat and consequently it was torpedoed. The sinking of the cruiser did not alter the military strategy of the UK which was to maintain carefully graduated pressure on Argentina. The UK hope is still to achieve a political solution rather than a military victory.

4. Bullard went on to outline the UK view of the developments on the diplomatic front. Security Council Resolution 502 remained the basis of the UK approach. The reported Argentine willingness to implement the Resolution had turned out to be false as they wanted a diplomatic solution on their terms before any withdrawal. The UK thought it more realistic to imagine a plan in three phases (i) a cease-fire (ii) a withdrawal of forces (iii) interim arrangements during which negotiations would be held to secure a definitive solution of the problem. Community Ambassadors in London had already been briefed on the UK willingness to approach the problem on this basis and to respond to an initiative from any quarter. The UK itself could not make the proposal because anything it would propose would be rejected by Argentina. One purpose of Pym's most recent visit to the US was to discuss with Haig and the UN Secretary General various proposals to achieve a political solution. At a meeting between Pym and the UNSG in New York on 2 May, the Secretary General had indicated that he was thinking of a joint appeal to Argentina and Britain in which he would express his deep concern at the conflict, emphasise the role of the UN, state the importance of implementing Security Council Resolution 502 without delay and request the two parties without prejudice to their rights and claims to act as follows within specified deadlines: (i) to begin withdrawal of the forces of both sides (ii) to begin negotiations by an agreed date (iii) to lift exclusion/war zones (iv) to lift economic sanctions and (v) to agree on interim arrangements, administration of the territory pending definitive negotiations. Although the UK had ruled out nothing, it did not seem that this proposal would really solve the problem and it was likely that a communication along these lines would be sent in reply to the Secretary General. As regards the possibility of a Security Council meeting, the UK understanding was that no delegation had made any formal proposal but France and Ireland may have other information on this.

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5. Pym had also met with Haig in Washington. Haig had made clear that the US still considered it had a role to play and that "he was still in business". The US attitude was probably due to personal factors (on the part of Haig who wished to minimise the impact of failure of his mediation effort) and to US concern for its long-term position in the hemisphere. Haig had expressed interest in the Peruvian ideas which had been mentioned in some press reports. These ~~were~~ consisted of seven points:-

- (i) a ceasefire;
- (ii) phased withdrawal of forces of both sides;
- (iii) involvement of third parties in the administration of the territory;
- (iv) acceptance by both parties that a dispute on sovereignty exists;
- (v) a willingness by both parties that the views and interests of the islanders would be taken into account in a definitive settlement;
- (vi) establishment of a contact group of other states;
- (vii) a commitment to reach a definitive settlement by a specific date, for example, April 1983.

*NB. not wishes!*

It was not clear to what extent these ideas were Peruvian or US in origin (Bullard implied that Haig may have been feeding some aspects of the results of his own efforts into the Peruvian proposals). The UK view was that these ideas were of interest and they could provide some basis for an accommodation, although details would be very important. Composition of the contact group, for example, could not be exclusively Latin American or Western European. There appeared to be some Argentine interest in the Peruvian ideas and two generals (Iglesias and Moiya?) had visited Lima to obtain clarification.

6. Bullard concluded saying that the British Cabinet had met this morning and the Foreign Secretary would be making a statement in the House of Commons. He mentioned that Pym may send another message soon to his colleagues in the Ten and the UK thought that it would be useful if the Political Committee could be ready to meet again if this was appropriate. He asked other delegations for the views of their governments on the situation. The Presidency then proceeded to a tour-de-table to ascertain the positions of delegations.

7. Denmark said that its government had issued a statement containing the following elements:-

- concern about escalation of the conflict;
- stress necessity of finding a solution on the basis of Security Council Resolution 502;
- further escalation would have consequences which would be difficult to ignore;
- further loss of human life should be avoided;
- appeal to Britain and Argentina to do their utmost to reach a negotiated settlement.

Denmark hoped that the unity of the Ten could be maintained. It hoped that the UK would exercise restraint; otherwise a number of Community governments would face problems and the solidarity of the Ten <sup>would</sup> fall apart. The Ten should emphasise the need for a peaceful negotiated settlement.

8. Germany said that the delegation had been instructed to raise three questions:-

- (i) to what extent had the attack on the Argentine cruiser been an accident or a deliberate escalation of military pressure outside the exclusion zone?
- (ii) what was the UK assessment of Pym's trips to Washington and New York?
- (iii) what was the UK view on the various proposals put forward? What limits did Britain place on the use of the military option?

Some of these questions had been answered in the UK intervention. Germany shared the Danish concern. Public support was forthcoming so far for the position of the Ten but there was increasing concern at the use of military measures. The search for a political solution should be pursued without interruption. All possibilities should be explored and perhaps the focus should now move towards the UN.

9. Greece said its position had not changed. There was strong support in Athens for a diplomatic solution and all avenues should be explored whether through the auspices of the UN or another agency. Greece attached great importance to maintenance of Community solidarity. Public opinion was concerned about the situation especially when conflict led to loss of life. It was important to stress the need for a diplomatic solution recognising that it is not for the UK to make concessions.

10. France said that the news of the torpedoing of the Argentine cruiser and the serious loss of life had been received with some consternation. The situation was now very serious due to an intransigent Argentine attitude. Public opinion and governments were increasingly concerned. The crisis had reached a critical point and it could soon reach the point of no-return. The French Government thought that efforts to seek a negotiated solution on the basis of Security Council Resolution 502 were more urgent than ever in order to avoid continuation of war. The Ten should encourage the UN Secretary General to look into ways of bringing about a ceasefire, followed by implementation of Security Council Resolution 502 and the launching of negotiations.

11. Ireland thanked the UK for its account of the latest developments and of the results of Mr. Pym's visit to Washington and New York. The Irish government had issued two statements - one on Sunday, 2 May and the other on 4 May, which had been issued just before the present meeting began. The texts of both statements were read out to the meeting. The "adequate framework" in the statement of 2 May referred to Security Council Resolution 502. The reference to concern at military escalation reflected the judgement of the Irish government that such escalation could feed a wider and more dangerous conflict and make a negotiated solution more difficult to achieve. As regards the second statement, its reference to withdrawal of the Community's economic sanctions reflected the changed situation following the actual use of military measures. The original decision to take sanctions in a spirit of Community solidarity was based on the fact that there was an equilibrium between the three elements of pressure on Argentina - diplomatic, economic and strength. It now seemed that this equilibrium had been upset since the emphasis in the British approach had shifted towards the military option. This shift in emphasis had led to the perception of public opinion and of other countries that sanctions were seen as an extension of a military rather than a political/diplomatic solution.

12. Ireland went on to refer to the present activity at the UN. The Secretary General was waiting to hear from both parties. It was not clear yet how effective a Security Council meeting might be but such a meeting could, in the light of developments and the continuing discussions in New York, aim to endorse a role for the Secretary General with a mandate along the lines that had already been mentioned.

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13. Italy joined with Germany in asking the UK to clarify the limits of the military operations. Italy also wanted to know more about the chances of a settlement on the basis of the Peruvian proposals in which Haig seemed to have had an involvement. The Italian government thought that the latest military action (the sinking of the Argentine cruiser) was a very serious escalation and public opinion in Italy was most concerned. Italy thought it very important to maintain the unity of the Ten and the government's position of solidarity with the UK was firm in regard to Argentina's initial aggression. It was necessary to avoid military measures and there had to be a more evident willingness to negotiate than had been up to now. Italy wondered whether the latest military action would reduce Argentine resistance to a realistic agreement.

14. Luxembourg said that, in the absence of the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister on a visit to China, their reaction at official level was of fear of the consequences of military escalation. They feared that the situation could get worse and they favoured an initiative at the UN.

15. The Netherlands said that its basic position remained one of solidarity with the UK. However, it was worried about the military escalation, in particular, the attack on the Argentine cruiser outside the exclusion zone. Would Argentine mainland targets (air-fields) be bombed? The Dutch Foreign Minister felt that the action taken by Britain in sinking the cruiser was disproportionate to the aims to be achieved. The Netherlands would like greater emphasis on a peaceful solution by diplomatic means. In this connection, the Dutch asked if Britain's position on negotiations was as had been reported: that Britain would negotiate only after a total Argentine withdrawal from the Falkland Islands. The Dutch hoped that this was not true and would welcome clarification by the British.

(In private conversation, the Dutch Political Director expressed dismay and disapproval of what he saw was a lack of prior consultation by Ireland with its Community partners before embarking on unilateral initiatives).

16. Belgium said that its position was similar to others. There was concern at the military escalation and regret at the loss of life. They feared that the situation might reach a point of no return. A negotiated solution was more important than ever on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 502. The UN was an appropriate forum to promote negotiations through the good offices of the Secretary General. It was important that the unity and solidarity of the Ten should continue and it should be stressed that Argentina was the first to have had recourse to the use of force.

17. Following the tour-de-table the UK intervened to reply to the points made in discussion as follows:-

- (i) the sinking of the Argentine cruiser was neither an accident nor a deliberate military escalation. It was an action which was necessary to protect the security of the British task force and faced with the choice of a threat to the lives of British sailors/soldiers the task force commanders had clear instructions to take such action;
- (ii) the UK concept of negotiation was based on Security Council Resolution 502. As Pym had explained to the UN Secretary General, Britain was not closing the door to any diplomatic/political initiative. The UK acknowledged that Argentina had made a claim to the islands. It had welcomed the Peruvian interest and hope to respond shortly. The UK was willing to consider a phased solution consisting of (i) a ceasefire (ii) withdrawal of forces by both sides (iii) negotiations on definitive solution. The problem was that Argentina wanted a pre-determined outcome to (iii) before it would consider (i) or (ii). The UK could not agree to withdraw its forces so as to participate in negotiations whose outcome was already prejudiced. The UK gave information on Pym's statement to the House of Commons in which he had stressed the British desire for a peaceful solution;
- (iii) as to the limits of the UK military operations, it would not be appropriate to divulge information on military operations. However, the purpose of the exclusion zone was to isolate the Falkland Islands from the mainland. This was being accomplished by the physical presence of the task force and the bombing of Port Stanley airport. The bombing of mainland Argentine military installations clearly didn't fit into that strategy although Bullard was not in a position to say that it wouldn't happen.
- (iv) Ireland had said that escalation of military measures against Argentina could make negotiation more difficult. However, for over three weeks there had been no use of force by Britain but Argentina had shown no sign of flexibility. There was no evidence to suggest that restraint in the use of force would make Argentina more amenable to negotiation.

- (v) On economic sanctions by the Community, the UK noted the Irish position. The UK hoped that all of the Ten would consider carefully the effect of any statements made and the likely interpretation of such statements in Argentina. At the very least the UK would hope that no partner would withdraw support in a demonstrative way.

18. In the discussion which followed, the following points emerged:-

- (i) Denmark said it was very important to maintain Ten unity and the government in Copenhagen had acted with restraint in the hope of genuine efforts to reach a peaceful solution. However, the Ten were entitled to know to what extent the British government would take the views of the Ten into account.
  
- (ii) Greece asked whether Ireland would unilaterally lift sanctions and what the modalities would be for decision-making in the Community. The Presidency hoped that Ireland would stay with a common Ten line. Denmark said that the decision on sanctions was taken in the political context and a decision to lift them would not just be a technical matter as it would require a political evaluation. The Commission said that although the basic political decision was taken in EPC, the legal framework for the decision was provided by the Community institutions. COREPER would meet on Thursday. The Ministers would be meeting informally over the weekend. And the absence of renewal the sanctions would lapse on 17 May. Ireland said that it was clear from the government statement that the political consensus which underlay the decision on sanctions no longer existed and the Irish delegation could not agree to any Presidency conclusion that implied approval for continuation of sanctions. As regards the modalities of lifting sanctions, no doubt instructions would issue from capitals.

- (iii) France referred to the Irish government statement of 4 May calling for an immediate meeting of the Security Council. The delegation stressed that in current circumstances when the Secretary General appeared to be preparing the ground for negotiations, it could be dangerous for a meeting of the Security Council to be held. France had no wish for a full debate in the Security Council and feared that it could give rise to a polemical debate in which the various parties would become even more intransigent and certain third countries (e.g. USSR) would seek to benefit. This could make it difficult for the Secretary General to prepare the basis for a constructive solution. France therefore appealed to Ireland to consider this aspect carefully. Ireland noted the French appeal and said that while it was difficult to predict events at the UN, it seemed likely that members of the Security Council would be conscious of the efforts by the Secretary General and the Security Council might be able to play a useful role by giving him support for his efforts. All other parties then intervened to stress the dangers involved in convening a meeting of the Security Council without proper preparation. Denmark in addition said that given the right conditions a useful role for the Security Council could not be ruled out.

19. The meeting then discussed what conclusions it could reach. The Presidency enquired whether a statement should be made to the press. This was firmly rejected, and the Presidency was criticised for leaking to the press the information that a meeting of the Political Committee was about to be held. It was agreed that if there were further press queries to the Presidency, it would merely say that the meeting had been held and had discussed the situation.

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20. As regards the confidential conclusions of the Political Committee a short series of draft conclusions were agreed containing the following elements:-

- expression of concern of the Ten at the latest military developments
- negotiated solution on basis of Resolution 502 more urgent than ever
- any initiative aimed at reaching such a solution should be encouraged
- the UN is an appropriate forum to develop such initiatives

21. The meeting had a brief discussion on topics for the informal weekend meeting of Foreign Ministers on 8/9 May. The Presidency identified the following topics:

- Genscher/Colombo Plan
- Middle East - report by Tindemans on his visit to the area
- Falkland Islands problem
- Transatlantic Consultations
- East-West Relations (including latest developments in Poland)
- the Versailles Summit
- the Mandate

Political Division  
Department of Foreign Affairs  
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