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RECORD OF MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER OF BRAZIL
1830 HOURS, SATURDAY 5 JUNE 1982

ARB 0203 (69)

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Defence Dept

APUSO

PP. WS. 11/6

Present:

Mr G W Harding,
HM Ambassador

Mr M Perceval,
Counsellor

Sr Ramiro Saraiva Guerreiro,
Foreign Minister of Brazil

Sr Rubens Ricupero,
Head of Americas Division,
Itamaraty

Sr R Sardenberg
Cabinet of the Foreign
Minister

Release of Vulcan Aircraft

1. HM Ambassador said that the Brazilian reversal of its earlier decision to release the Vulcan aircraft at Rio airport once disarmed, had caused surprise and dismay in London. He handed over a bout de papier which the Foreign Minister read through in silence.
2. Sr Saraiva Guerreiro said that the situation was a difficult one: was there a state of war or not, irrespective of formal declarations to that effect? No conventions or precedents had initially seemed applicable in the case of the Vulcan, and when his concurrence had first been sought by the Air Ministry for its release, once disarmed, he had agreed, because this seemed the commonsensical thing to do. However, the démarche upon instructions of the Argentine Ambassador on Friday morning created a new situation, and it would have seemed arbitrary to have dismissed the Argentine démarche out of hand. The decision to release the aircraft had thus been "suspended" pending study of the legal aspect by the Itamaraty and Air Ministry lawyers. This would resume on Monday. It was impossible to estimate precisely how long it would take, or what its conclusive recommendations would be. It might be necessary to hold the plane until the end of hostilities, but he was not adamant about it. Circumstances changed day by day. Monday might bring illumination on the legal aspect.
3. HM Ambassador asked what was meant by the "end of hostilities"? What if we stopped fighting but the Argentines did not? Sr Guerreiro said that he understood hostilities to mean the military action in progress on land in the Falkland Islands. After that phase, a different situation would prevail, with political and diplomatic action tending to replace military.
4. Sr Guerreiro said that the Vulcan crew could of course stay or depart as they chose. Itamaraty had cleared that with the Argentines, who had not objected. HM Ambassador asked whether Brazil would have restrained the crew if Argentina had objected. Sr Guerreiro said that Brazil had been confident of the efficacy of the arguments it had deployed, so the question had not arisen.

5. HM Ambassador asked about the fate of the aircraft's missile. Sr Guerreiro replied firmly that this could certainly not leave Brazil until the end of hostilities. It was being held under secure conditions at the military airbase. HM Ambassador described the place where the missile was held, and said that his US colleague had been instructed to reinforce his representation on the security of the missile. Sr Guerreiro said that, if it would help, the missile could be "sealed" in the presence of the Air Attaché. HM Ambassador emphasised the necessity for at least one member of the Vulcan crew to remain permanently on board the aircraft. There seemed to be an impression at the airbase that this was no longer appropriate. It was however essential. Sr Guerreiro said he had thought the aircraft to have been sealed, but if this was not so, he would ensure that the Air Ministry was made aware of the Ambassador's concern on this point. HM Ambassador asked if it would be possible to send out a replacement crew. Sr Guerreiro said no: this would cause too much of a publicity splash.

Brazilian-Argentine Relations

6. Sr Guerreiro said that this was a difficult time for Brazil, and she was bound to lose in various ways, as she sought to retain good relations with Argentina (while not giving that nation all it wanted) at the same time as Brazil preserved its diplomatic framework with the United Kingdom. Itamaraty's concern was that the good relationship with Argentina which had been achieved over the last few years, and to which President Figueiredo had himself contributed, should remain relations of trust, not resentment. The public saw only the tip of the iceberg. Thus, the problem of Itaipu had been resolved in 1979 - this was a false problem, but false problems could sometimes be the worst ones to deal with.

7. Sr Guerreiro said that Argentina had launched into the Malvinas action without saying anything to Brazil. At that point the Argentines had been very difficult to talk to. Thereafter, they became more tractable; but once again in recent days they had become more difficult to deal with. On his stopover in Brasilia on his way to Havana, Nicanor (Costa Mendez, the Argentine Foreign Minister) had asked Brazil for nothing; the discussion had been rather about the future. Despite the line taken by papers like O Estado de Sao Paulo, Itamaraty regarded Argentina as a bomb to be defused rather than kicked.

8. Sr Guerreiro said that he hoped Britain understood the difficult position Brazil found herself in, and would continue to understand it. Brazil had ruled out the use of Brazil for triangular arms sale (not only from Arab suppliers) ie sales to Argentina via Brazilian entities; but, by the same token, she felt bound to compensate by allowing Argentina to purchase armaments made in Brazil. HM Ambassador reminded the Foreign Minister of the undertaking he had given at the start of the conflict that such sales would never be of "decisive" equipment. Britain would take the strongest exception to the provision, say, of a submarine, which had at one time been rumoured. Sr Guerreiro said that Brazil had only the barest minimum of such major items and could not spare them for others. They had sold some Bandeirante maritime reconnaissance aircraft, and Argentina might put in a bid for Xavante trainers,

which could be adapted to a ground support role. Brazil spent only 0.9% of her GNP on arms, 16th position in Latin America.

Anglo-Brazilian Relations

9. HM Ambassador said that we understood Brazil's concerns for its southern neighbour; but this was not the only element in the equation. Brazil should be in no doubt as to the strength of feeling aroused in Britain at this critical time by its handling of the Vulcan. This was regarded as a litmus-test of Brazilian even-handedness. What had particularly caused a shockwave in London, was the Brazilian volte-face on the issue at Argentine behest after the Note issued by the Air Minister on Thursday, which had led everyone to believe that the aircraft would be able to proceed on its way once it had been disarmed. As the Permanent Under Secretary made clear to the Brazilian Ambassador, this was a matter on which the Secretary of State and Prime Minister had strong feelings. We trusted that the British representations already made would redress the balance. Sr Guerreiro said that they would indeed be accorded their full weight.

Argentine Airbridge through Recife

10. Sr Saraiva Guerreiro said that he had secured information only that afternoon on the matter the Ambassador had raised previously with the Itamaraty on possible use of Brazilian airports for staging of Argentine arms supply flights. The case had been handed over to the appropriate services, who had actually checked the flight referred to in the Embassy's most recent demarche, but had found nothing untoward about the cargo. HM Ambassador expressed considerable surprise, and referred to the reports in Brazilian newspapers to the contrary, which supported our own very specific information from outside Brazil. Sr Guerreiro and Sr Ricupero maintained that nothing to substantiate our suspicions had been discovered. HM Ambassador asked what the Brazilian authorities would have done if they had found weapons. Would they have impounded them and the aircraft? After a pause, Sr Saraiva Guerreiro said that he doubted they would have done anything so dramatic as to impound, but they would probably have tried to discourage the traffic. HM Ambassador enquired whether the Hague Rules, on the issue of carrying arms, could not be invoked to impound, in this instance? Sr Guerreiro avoided giving a direct answer.

Argentina and the Falklands

11. HM Ambassador asked whether Brazil had tried to persuade Argentina to withdraw its forces from the islands. Sr Guerreiro said that Brazil had never tried to persuade Argentina to adopt the solution preferred by the British Government, ie, simply departing. The suggestion now put forward by Britain that the Argentines should give an undertaking to withdraw in 10-15 days, would not achieve that result; it amounted to surrender without fighting. Brazil had put forward ideas, perhaps too late to achieve anything, in the letter he had sent to the President of the Security Council. A figleaf was needed for Argentina, perhaps in the form of a UN presence on the islands. The military phase

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appeared now to be approaching its end. It was hard to forecast the nature of the next stage. Nobody knew what might happen. On the question of Soviet arms for Argentina, or a possible realignment of Argentina to become a parallel associate of the Socialist Bloc, he had not, from his talks with Costa Mendes, gained the impression of a major change of position. Argentine membership of the OAS might become formal rather than substantive, and its role in the NAM might be enhanced. All this was subject, however, to there being no major upheaval in Argentina. A US base in the Falklands, for instance, would fatally attract Soviet attention, while a UN presence there could well be helpful in soothing the aftermath of the dispute.

Final Points

12. HM Ambassador reiterated HMG's concern to secure the prompt release of the Vulcan and its missile. He said that, had he been kept informed of Itamaraty's thinking in the course of Friday (he had made contact with Baena's office at midday, but the first we knew of the hitch was Ricupero's call at 1700, the time the press was informed) he could have explained the nature of Brazil's dilemma to London. The volte-face might then have caused less profound irritation. The Foreign Minister said that he had intended that a member of his staff should telephone me earlier to keep me informed. He undertook to keep the Embassy more fully in the picture in future.

British Embassy
BRASILIA

7 June 1982

PS/Mr Caslow
PS/PUS
Mr Wright
Emergency Unit
SAMD