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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

31 July, 1985

Prime Minister
CDP
31/7.

Dear Charles,

French Prime Minister's Visit to London: Argentina

In my letter to you earlier today I suggested that the Prime Minister might raise Falklands/Argentina with M. Fabius. We did not think it necessary for the Prime Minister to raise French arms sales to Argentina: we regularly remind the French up to Foreign Secretary level of our concern about this, and we had no hard information about prospective supplies.

This situation has changed with the information, received by telegram from the Embassy in Paris this afternoon, that the British liaison link at Aerospatiale has told the Embassy in confidence (and should not be quoted) that at least four Super Puma helicopters have been seen in Argentine colours out of storage, and that trials and other measures suggest preparations for delivery. The Embassy suspect that a French decision to agree to the supply of these helicopters may have been taken for reasons connected with the visit to France which President Alfonsin is due to make in September.

This is a disturbing development. The Super Puma is a large all-weather transport helicopter, which can be re-fuelled in flight, and could reach the Islands. We understand from the French themselves that the Argentines may have ordered as many as twenty four Super Pumas. This helicopter is comparable to the United States "Blackhawk", which the Americans, at our request, have refused to supply to Argentina. The US Administration indicated at the same time that they would find it difficult to maintain this position if the French were to sell Super Pumas to Argentina.

Consultation with the French about possible supplies of sophisticated weaponry to Argentina has been working fitfully, at best. The Foreign Secretary raised the question of Super Pumas with the French Foreign Minister in May, referring to press reports of their delivery to Argentina. The French promised to investigate, but nothing further has been heard, despite reminders from our Embassy.

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The Prime Minister will no doubt wish to draw M. Fabius' attention to the French promise in May to let us know where matters stood on the Super Pumas, and express concern at the information that has now reached us. These helicopters would constitute a clear increase in the threat to our Forces in the Falklands: news of their supply would generate hostile reactions here. These in turn would cut across our efforts to improve our bilateral relations with the Alfonsin regime - a factor which M. Fabius might well cite in defence of the French decision. In this connection, the Prime Minister could also point out that it is nonsensical for the Argentines to acquire expensive military equipment when their economic difficulties are so appalling. We have made all the running in seeking more normal relations with Argentina; it is important that our Allies and Partners should not, through high-profile gestures such as the supply of major items of military equipment, imply that they condone the Argentines' inflexible response to our initiatives.

I am copying this to Richard Mottram (MOD).

Yours ever,
Peter Ricketts
 (P F Ricketts)
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq
 10 Downing Street

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CAPT



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

30 July 1985

CJP
25/7.

Dear Charles,

Meeting with Monsieur Fabius: 1 August 1985

In your letter of 29 July, you asked whether we had an informed idea of what M. Fabius will raise with the Prime Minister.

The best information we have is contained in Sir John Fretwell's letter of 23 July to Derek Thomas, a copy of which I enclose. As you will see, even Fabius' cabinet are somewhat in the dark. We will ensure that the topics suggested in Sir John's letter (which correspond very much to those you mentioned with M. Viot) are adequately covered in the briefing which we will let you have shortly for this meeting.

Yours ever,
Peter Ricketts

(P F Ricketts)
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq
10 Downing Street

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BRITISH EMBASSY,
PARIS.

FROM THE AMBASSADOR

23 July 1985

D M D Thomas Esq CMG
DUSS
FCO

Dear Dick,

THE FRENCH PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO LONDON

1. I have written separately about Fabius' current political preoccupations and his prospects. This letter deals with the foreign affairs aspects of the visit; the topics that Fabius may raise with the Prime Minister; and those that she might raise with him.

Purpose of visit

2. Fabius' bid for a call on the Prime Minister was concerted with the Elysée and may well have been inspired by Mitterrand. He will certainly report back to the President. It is just possible he will have some special message to convey, though we have uncovered no hint of this here. The aim of the visit will be to add to Fabius' standing by showing that he is a spokesman for France at the top international tables.

3. Under the Fifth Republic, foreign policy has traditionally been the preserve of the President. This has continued to be true under Mitterrand. Mauroy was, at best, given only walk-on parts on the international stage; Fabius would like to do better, with at least a few opportunities to deliver some lines of his own. So far these opportunities have been relatively few, consisting of visits to the FRG, GDR, South Korea (where his task was to repair bilateral relations, which he did by effectively ruling out French recognition of North Korea), Morocco (where he put his foot in it by implying in public that France attached priority to Morocco over Algeria), and Algeria (where he failed to smooth ruffled feathers). A trip to the United States which he had been trying to arrange for this summer has fallen through. His visit to London will thus be of importance to him in terms of publicity and image-building particularly since Mrs

/Thatcher



Thatcher fascinates the French, even if the respect in which she is held across the political spectrum is grudging on the Left.

Points Fabius is likely to raise

4. Contacts with members of his Cabinet make it clear that Fabius has not yet given them any guidance about the subjects he will wish to raise. But it is assumed that he will want to touch on major current issues in European policy, the wider foreign policy scene and bilateral issues. Under European policy the French see institutional questions, the future of political cooperation, the inter-governmental conference, the improvement of decision-making procedures and Eureka as possible candidates. The European fighter aircraft is also obviously much in their minds (though increasingly in an adversarial sense as they set out to cajole or bully the Germans into partnership with France, not Britain). On the wider foreign policy canvas they would include Southern Africa, future multi-lateral trade negotiations and international monetary questions including debt, East-West relations including prospects under Gorbachev and the SDI, the Lebanon and terrorism. On the purely bilateral side, they are expecting the Channel fixed link to come up and perhaps some comparing of notes between the two Prime Ministers on the respective progress of British and French economic policy.

Points the Prime Minister might raise

5. Apart from explaining our ideas on the Community, it will be a good opportunity to raise the Falklands. The French vote at the UN will remain pivotal this year. Although Mitterrand will decide how it is cast, it will be worth explaining our position to Fabius, emphasising the efforts we have been making, and the lack of response from the Argentinians. Alfonsin is planning to visit Paris in September; and Argentinian pressure for an affirmative vote will be very strong. Our main argument will be that if political cooperation and Community solidarity mean anything at all, one EC member state must not vote against another in such circumstances. I would hope that this argument will prevail, but it will be a close run thing.

6. I also hope the Prime Minister might take the opportunity to say something to Fabius about British economic policies and achievements, with the aim of discouraging the habit of prominent French socialists (including Fabius himself last year) to quote UK experience out of context eg in relation to unemployment. It will do no harm for Fabius to hear from the Prime Minister about British economic achievements. It would also not come amiss for him to be told about the financial

/provision



provision made for those out of work. Unlike their counterparts in socialist France, the unemployed in Britain cannot suddenly find themselves without any recourse, doomed to swell the ranks of the nouveaux pauvres, when their benefits run out. If we can get these points across to Fabius, we may reduce the prospect that British economic policies will become a political football here between Left and Right during the forthcoming election campaign.

*Yours ever,
John*

John Fretwell

