



Prime Minister

I thought you might have missed, & wd. like to see, these comments on President Reagan (before he was president of course) by President Ford, in his memoirs A time to heal (a rather better book than one might have thought; but ghost-written).

Augh Thomas  
Dec. 20, 1983

gained in good faith, and the result was a less costly and far more responsible bill which I was happy to sign early in July.

Back in 1973, while still a member of Congress, I had promised Betty that I would quit politics in January 1977. I fully intended to honor that pledge, but Betty released me from it. She knew how I felt about being President. She thought the country needed me, and she said she wanted me to run. Mike, Jack, Steve and Susan all agreed with her. So on July 8, 1975, I made the decision official. "I expect to work hard, campaign forthrightly and do the very best I can to finish the job I have begun," I said. Reporters were curious. Did I expect to face opposition in the primaries? I said something to the effect that I thought competition was healthy and that I'd welcome it. Actually, I expected to win the Republican nomination for President in a breeze.

Some of my closest advisers—Marsh and Hartmann in particular—had been warning me for months to prepare for a difficult challenge from Ronald Reagan. I hadn't taken those warnings seriously because I didn't take Reagan seriously. During the years that Nixon was President, I had seen Reagan only occasionally. The two of us sometimes appeared at the same Republican functions, and while we were always polite to one another, the chemistry wasn't right. He was one of the few political leaders I have ever met whose public speeches revealed more than his private conversations. I have always been able to get to know people pretty easily. I tried to get to know Reagan, but I failed. He was pleasant and congenial, yet at the same time formal and reserved with me. I never knew what he was really thinking behind that winning smile.

Which is not to say that I didn't respect his unique talents or the record he had compiled in his eight years as governor of California. He was an extraordinarily effective public speaker who had a superb knack of exploiting a punch line. He was far more knowledgeable about a wide range of issues than many people thought, and he held deep convictions. But several of his characteristics seemed to rule him out as a serious challenger. One was his penchant for offering simplistic solutions to hideously complex problems. A second was his conviction that he was always right in every argument; he seemed unable to acknowledge that he might have made a mistake. Finally, I'd heard from people who knew him well that he liked to conserve his energy.

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From every campaign I'd witnessed, I knew that you can't run for President and expect to work only from nine to five.

I was aware that the more conservative members of our party were pretty upset with me. My decision to grant earned amnesty to draft dodgers and deserters from the Vietnam War, my selection of Rockefeller as Vice President and the unprecedented federal budget deficit—all these things drove them up the wall. But I recognized that these right-wingers would *always* be on my back. I had to call the shots as I saw them from the nation's point of view, and I knew from my own experience that trying to satisfy these zealots would doom any general election hopes in 1976. I kept reading in the press that I was the most conservative President since Herbert Hoover. If that was true, I reasoned, then what I was doing should satisfy most Republicans. And I didn't think Republican voters would want to change their Presidential candidate and risk putting the Democrats back in power again.

What I failed to understand at the time was that several different factors would come together in the summer of 1975 to make a Reagan challenge inevitable. The first was the new federal election law and a conflict it created in my own ranks. The second was the presence in the United States of a noted Soviet author. Third was my decision to attend a thirty-five-nation conference in the Finnish capital of Helsinki. Finally, there was the public reaction to an interview that Betty gave to *60 Minutes* reporter Morley Safer on CBS-TV.

In March 1974, as Vice President, I had delivered a speech criticizing "CREEP"—Nixon's Committee to Reelect the President—and suggesting that all future national campaigns be run under the aegis of the Republican and Democratic National Committees. I had hoped to have the RNC manage my 1976 campaign, but that was impossible. New legislation that Congress had passed in the wake of Watergate said that RNC could handle only the campaign of the party's nominee for President; it couldn't involve itself in the primaries. If I was going to run in the primaries, I had to set up a separate political committee. So on June 19, I authorized the President Ford Committee (PFC) to start raising funds in my behalf.

The question then became who should manage the campaign. My first choice was Mel Laird. But Mel had business commitments he



8 Wilfred Street · London SW1E 6PL · Telephone 01-828 1176

Box

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Dear Caroline

I enclose some memoranda for  
the Prime Minister :

1. Relations with the Argentine
2. Central America Lebanon & Vietnam
3. Gibraltar Ceuta & Melilla
4. Something abt. Pres Reagan by  
ex president Ford
5. A note about Cuba (to follow)  
<sup>sorry-</sup>

Also a Christmas card for her from us

Wendy helps Christmas to you & Richd.

Yours ever

Alagh.

## Relations with the Argentine

Our long term aim in relation to the Argentine is presumably the maintenance of our sovereignty in the Falklands; and at the same time the re-establishment of communications and of commercial and diplomatic relations.

That is our maximum position, as it were.

In this respect we need to recall that, though the Argentine maintained a claim to the islands continuously in the past, that was never pressed hard in the great days of Anglo-Argentine commerce (say 1860-1930). The claim only began to figure in any prominence, in Argentine school histories, I think, after the beginning of rampant nationalism and political catastrophe inaugurated by Perón in 1943.

Let us not forget that the longest lasting president of the Argentine, General Rosas, offered to abandon all claims, in the 1840s, if only we were able to persuade Barings Bank to forget about their loan to him twenty years or so before.

There is no strategic interest for the Argentines in the Falklands; there can be no serious economic interest for them; the Argentines are not particularly interested in nature, nor in scientific exploration.

Thus their interest is rhetorical.

When, in the 1970s, there was a direct air link between the islands and Buenos Aires, the Argentines who went over to Port Stanley did so out of curiosity and did not want to stay long, as I understand.

Now, against this background, I have now studied (in an abbreviated English text only, as yet) the remarks about the Falklands in Senor Alfonsín's speech to which you referred in conversation last Wednesday. \*

Very unpromising, I agree, at first sight.

But how seriously do we need to take them? They were remarks addressed primarily to his domestic audience.

Would it not be possible to dismiss such declaratory remarks as just rhetoric and consider instead, and emphasise on our side, the (admittedly slender) indications that the Argentines may be interested in talking to you about tactical matters? (This is how the Kennedy brothers dealt with a similarly rhetorical statement by Khrushchev in very different circumstances in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962).

/Could

Could we not, while making it clear that we are not talking of sovereignty, discuss the possibility of exchanging, say, an end of hostilities in return for the abandonment of the exclusion zone?

Then, while work in the airport continues could we not say publicly that this airport, essential though it would be for us in the event of a recurrence on hostilities (wholly improbable in the foreseeable future) would also have an essential role in the future development of the Falklands and its dependencies as proposed in the Shackleton report.

Presumably there could then be a re-establishment of diplomatic relations; and the ambassadors, or more junior officials, might begin such discussions as we would desire about transport links, post, etc.

By that time, the new Argentine regime would presumably be deeply involved in its own affairs (the economy, trials of their generals): and we could aim to relegate the issue of the Falklands to the low point in their agenda that I think it had before 1953 or 1950 (when the Radicals were last in power - a point to recall).

In those circumstances, we could presumably afford to discuss all future possibilities for the development of the islands - taking into account for example, Julian Amery's recent suggestion for the use of them in Antarctic exploration.

Hugh Thomas

December 21, 1983

Hugh Thomas.

\* I have now seen the Spanish text. There is nothing to add save to note that the paragraph concerned is buried in the middle of a very long speech indeed.

CENTRAL AMERICA, LEBANON AND VIETNAM

The analogy of Vietnam is often used very loosely, as we all remember from Senator Edward Kennedy's foolish remarks about our position in Northern Ireland suggested years ago.

Still, the long war in Vietnam had the most degenerating effect on the United States. The mood in 1975, when the United States finally abandoned Saigon, was one of questioning whether any United States international commitment could last. Indeed, I remember being approached that year by the 20th Century Foundation in New York, to write a study about the length of time Americans might have to remain committed to Western Europe (I did not write it).

The Lebanon and Central America are both two commitments that the United States have now assumed. Quite different though they are in character to Vietnam, both could go badly wrong, and lead to long conflicts which, by the nature of things, it would be difficult for the United States to "win".

The Soviet Union must be as aware of this as anyone else. It must surely be one of their aims to tie down the United States in one of the ways I suggest, provoking the same upheaval in both the Alliance and the United States' domestic front, as occurred in the late 60s and early 70s.

Hugh Thomas  
Dec. 21 1983

GIBRALTAR, CEUTA and MELILLA

My impression increasingly is that the Spanish Government is more and more worried about their position in Ceuta and Melilla, the two Spanish enclaves on the north coast of Africa, which Spain has held since the 15th century\*.

Most Spaniards privately concede that these two remnants of the Spanish Empire in North Africa are, in the long run, undefendable. This may be a bit pessimistic since both could, no doubt, be provided for by the sea (at great expense); and the Moroccan Army is not in any position to challenge Spain in a major war. Even so, the threat is obvious and I suppose a real row between Spain and Morocco could threaten the Canaries, which are much closer to Morocco than they are to Spain.

The sensitivity of both these positions derives from what the Spanish Government rightly looks on as likely military reaction, if there were to be cession at home of one, or both, of them: Ceuta is the main training place of the Spanish Foreign Legion; while Melilla had a symbolic meaning for Spanish army officers, as the town which resisted a Moroccan rebellion in the 1920s with great courage. It is a kind of Spanish Ladysmith.

It would seem to me that the current occupation with Gibraltar in the last year or so owes something, at least, to the realisation that the Spanish Government would have to try and offer their people something if they had to make any kind of concession over these North African properties.

I just wonder whether HMG might consider some friendly statement about Spanish rights to Ceuta and Melilla, perhaps implying that this matter would have to be discussed in the context of Spain joining NATO, when it is confirmed, in order first, to create a warmer relation between Spain and Britain; second, to avoid any heightened pressure on the Gibraltar question.

Hugh Thomas Dec. 20 1983

\*Actually for the first 100 years or so Melilla was held by Portugal. It did not pass to Spain till 1580, but the point is the same.