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POLICY STATEMENTS

14/84. FOREIGN POLICY: AREAS OF CONCERN

Sir Geoffrey Howe, Secretary of State
for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs,
at the London Diplomatic Association
on March 6, 1984:

Britain is keen to put relations with a democratic Argentina back onto a more normal footing, Sir Geoffrey Howe, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, said when he addressed the London Diplomatic Association in London on March 6.

"We made a number of proposals to them in January and we have now had a considered reply which we are studying," he said.

In his speech, Sir Geoffrey looked at a number of foreign issues -- NATO and East-West relations, the European Community, the Falklands, Hong Kong and Southern Africa.

He said:

"I have been Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary for less than a year; and I am still struck -- though no longer surprised -- by the vast range of the subjects which cross my desk. It is a natural reaction to try to group them for better understanding into blocks that make sense; and the alphabetical order of the filing cabinet, from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, has only limited value in this respect.

"A more helpful approach -- although all attempts at packaging have their disadvantages -- is to divide the British interest in most overseas issues into three broad categories.

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1. There are the questions of most immediate importance to our security and prosperity; the questions which are at the heart of our relationship with our Allies in NATO and our partners in the Community.
2. There are the questions outside this central area which have particular importance because Britain has a direct responsibility in the matter.
3. There are major questions which do not fall into either of the first two categories; where Britain has a direct interest but only limited influence. Here we try to work with others to lessen threats to peace and security in the world and to encourage stability and economic growth.

1a) NATO And East/West Relations

"In the first category, the Atlantic Alliance remains the foundation stone of our security and of that of Western Europe as a whole. It is a defensive Alliance and always will be. We mean it when we say that we will not be the first to resort to weapons. Our societies are open, our democracies vigorous, and any free and unbiased observer can see that what we say is true.

"It is also a strong Alliance and we aim to keep it that way. It is based on one fundamental reality: that in order effectively to deter the potential Soviet threat to our freedom and way of life, the Allied nations on both sides of the Atlantic -- the U.S., Canada and the Europeans -- must stand together. That is why successive British Governments irrespective of party, have attached so much importance to maintaining a strong relationship with the United States.

"And this is precisely what has been achieved and maintained over the 35 years of the Alliance. You would not always think so to listen to the commentators, who have been diagnosing rifts and predicting crises for almost as long as I can remember. But the Alliance has not reached its 35th anniversary in good order on a basis of complacency. Nor is there room for complacency now. There have been difficulties in the past, as there will no doubt be in the future. But I have no doubt that they can be successfully handled.

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"It goes without saying that this success will be of the greatest importance to the members of the Alliance themselves. But there is more to it than that. The security we want for ourselves is not security at the expense of others. A strong Western Alliance is no threat to anyone. The security that it provides is and must remain the basis for the peaceful and prosperous Europe we all want to see.

"The British Government will continue to play a full part in making sure that this basis remains strong. And in working to build on it a realistic and lasting improvement in East/West relations.

"I don't think that anyone here today would dispute the need for this improvement. The fact that the Soviet chair in Geneva remains empty is just one striking example of what I am talking about. I hope that wiser thoughts will prevail in Moscow. There is no place for walkouts in such a crucially important field.

"At the same time, we must recognize that negotiations on arms control, for all their importance, cannot bear the whole of the weight of East/West relations. There is work to be done also in the wider political field to establish a broader understanding with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. We have no illusions about the extent of the differences between East and West; nor do we expect them to disappear overnight. But there is plenty to talk about. And, as far as the West is concerned, the message is clear: the door to the negotiating chamber has always been open, and it remains open.

"The Ministerial meeting of the North Atlantic Council which I attended in Brussels last December made this unmistakably clear. We want, and are ready to work for, a balanced and constructive relationship with the Soviet Union and with the countries of Eastern Europe.

"Since then, some progress has been made -- admittedly in a gradual and undramatic way. The CDE has opened at Stockholm. I had a useful meeting with Mr. Gromyko there, as did many of my Western colleagues. We agreed, as Mr. Gromyko put it, to seriousify our relationship. Seriousify may not be the longest-established word in the English language... But it is a very good word for all that. Mrs. Thatcher, who visited Budapest in February, was able to reinforce the message in her talks with Mr. Kadar and other Hungarian leaders. And she and I did the same when we attended President Andropov's funeral in Moscow and met Mr. Chernenko and Mr. Gromyko there.

"I have no doubt that there is scope for steady and sustainable progress in East/West relations on the

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basis that we have suggested. And I have equally no doubt that such progress is as much in the interest of the East as it is of the West.

1b) European Community

"Our relationship with our partners in the Community also falls into the first of the three categories I suggested. I see no contradiction for British interests between the maintenance of a strong Atlantic Alliance and the development of a greater sense of European identity.

"This is true even in the defense field. We would like to see great cooperation among the Europeans on defense matters. The foundations in terms of common projects and organizations already exist. Providing it does not undermine the vital transatlantic links on which our security ultimately depends, any initiative which can usefully promote greater collaboration on security issues among European nations will certainly have British support.

"But cooperation with the countries of Western Europe in defense matters is of course only one part of the picture. British membership of the European Community is increasingly central to our foreign policy. That fact is certainly reflected in the volume of paper on the Community crossing my desk -- and by the amount of time I spend in Brussels and other Community capitals.

"It must sometimes be tempting -- even for professional observers like you -- to see the Community in headline terms of crisis or breakthrough. But the truth about the Community is less dramatic. That the Athens Summit failed to reach agreement is certainly true. But it is not the whole truth -- nor even the most important part of the truth.

"For that, you must look below the surface to the real progress achieved in the 25 days of negotiation by Foreign Ministers which preceded Athens. And to the similar negotiations which are taking place in the run-up to the March European Council.

"I was asked just recently by a reporter why it was that, with so many other major issues at stake, European Foreign Ministers devoted so much time to the nuts and bolts of the Community agenda at the expense, say, of the Middle East or disarmament. We must of course do both if the Community is to play its full part in the affairs of the world. But these are not separate, unrelated tasks. The Community is the world's largest economic grouping. As such, the arrangements it makes with its trading

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partners -- in developed and developing countries alike -- have an enormous economic and political impact. Similarly, the Community's ability to develop and to welcome new members depends upon its being in sound shape itself. And, however esoteric the subject matter of the present grand negotiation may seem, its successful conclusion is of major importance to the 230 million people who make up the European Community.

"And this is why decision-making in the Community is often so difficult. We are not adopting empty declarations. We are taking decisions which have to be implemented by every member state and must, therefore, be acceptable to all. For example, we are trying to establish, at the Community level, the same kind of Budget discipline which each of us as individual member states has had to accept at the national level. These are not questions which can be settled by generalities, or by taking votes. The answer will have to be built up carefully, block by block; and the outcome will have to be one with which all the member states are in agreement.

"Some of the questions involved -- including of course, the question of Budgetary imbalances -- are of very great interest to Britain. But these are not British problems or Danish problems or Belgian problems. They are problems which have to be tackled if the Community is to meet the challenge of enlargement and future development with the dynamism and success which we all want to see.

"At the moment, the negotiations are still very much on course. And the fact that all Ten member states press their national interest should not be a cause for shocked surprise. But each also has a national interest in the Community as a whole. So there is nothing unreconcilable in the apparent paradox that what emerges from the negotiations must be a collective agreement by the Ten which is in the national interest of each member state. For each of us is convinced that we have to make decisive progress in the very near future. Our national interests and those of all our partners are such that we cannot allow the Community to decay. These then are the central issues -- the ones of fundamental importance where we work through and with our partners and Allies.

2a) The Falklands

"Let me now turn to the second category; and take by way of example two questions for which Britain has a direct responsibility which are currently much in the news: the Falklands and Hong Kong.

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"The first thing to understand about these two subjects is that each is quite separate; and that solutions must be found which fully respect the specific circumstances of the individual case.

"But the two do sometimes tend to be looked at as examples -- albeit quite separate examples -- of the same sort of foreign policy preoccupation. On the other hand, it can be argued that the territories concerned are not vital to our central foreign policy objectives. On the other, there is no doubt at all about their continuing importance on my agenda and that of my colleagues.

"The argument that these problems are not central in fact takes too narrow a view of British foreign policy. And too narrow a view of what the British people think right and what they want to achieve. And it overlooks the importance for Britain's reputation of being seen to handle the problems associated with these territories in a way which accords with our general desire to see a peaceful, just and democratic world.

"The Falklands are a good example of what I mean. Two years ago, most British people would probably not have given the islands a prominent place on their political agenda, but the invasion and its aftermath made an enormous impression on the British public: nothing can be quite the same again.

"Let me explain the importance of the issues at stake. The islands are British territory. We know of course that Argentina also claims sovereignty over them. At the time of the Argentine invasion in April 1982, we were engaged in negotiations which covered all the subjects in dispute between us. After the traumatic events of the Falklands War, with its tragic loss of human life, we and the Islanders need to be absolutely sure that such a thing will never happen again. That is why we have had to make the military dispositions necessary to defend the islands.

"Our commitment to honor the wishes of the Islanders is firm. Some have said that the views of 1,800 people should not determine British policy. But the right to self-determination applies whether the people concerned number 1,800 or 18 million. It is a right that we shall continue to uphold for the Falkland Islanders.

"We have welcomed the restoration of democracy and the arrival of President Alfonsin in Argentina. We hope that the new Argentine Government will come to see that the democratic choice which brought them to power must apply equally to the Falkland Islanders.

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"We are keen to put our relations with democratic Argentina back onto a more normal footing. You will have read in the press that we made a number of proposals to them in January. We have now had a considered reply which we are studying. The details must remain confidential. But one thing is clear: we want to move on to the kind of relations which should exist between Britain and Argentina.

2b) Hong Kong

Let me now turn for a moment to the quite different case of Hong Kong. I dare say that you would all regard it as a diplomatic equivalent of a journalist's scoop if I revealed today anything very new on the negotiations with China. Equally, I know that as diplomats you will understand why, by common agreement, the content of the talks is confidential. Progress can best be ensured by enabling the negotiators on both sides to pursue their task quietly and calmly. And there is no doubt that progress has been made. It has a firm basis because the two sides share a common objective: the continued stability and prosperity of Hong Kong. This in turn requires arrangements to ensure that confidence there is maintained.

"The people, who naturally, are most interested in what the future will have to offer are all those who live and work in Hong Kong. The British Government is keeping in close touch with opinion there, notably through the Governor and through his Executive Council. And our aim in the negotiations with the Chinese Government remains what it has been from the outset: an agreement acceptable to Parliament, to the Chinese Government and to the people of Hong Kong.

3a) Southern Africa

"That brings me to the third category: to issues outside Europe where Britain has a real interest in what is going on -- and in helping find solutions to problems -- but where we have no direct responsibility and only limited influence. This means in many cases that we need to work with others -- usually outside the formal framework of the Alliance or the Community -- to promote the interests we share with our friends. Our membership of the Commonwealth is of particular interest in this connection. So too, of course, is the fact that we have special responsibilities as one of the five Permanent Members of the United Nations Security Council.

"This third category, as you will have guessed, is a very wide one. And you will be uneasily aware that there are all too many examples that I could choose from to illustrate it. The Lebanon, the Gulf War, and Central America

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are among the most topical, and among the most important. But there are limits even to the patience of a professional diplomat, and I do not want to strain it too far. So let me take but one example, that of Southern Africa, and try to explain what our interests are and how we promote them.

"British interests are very much involved, both materially and politically, on both sides of the Limpopo. We are there as major trading partners and as major investors. There are U.K. passport holders in South Africa and there are U.K. passport holders in Zimbabwe and elsewhere. Many countries in the region are members of the Commonwealth. Our ties with them are therefore particularly close, and they have tended to look to us for assistance and support in times of difficulty. And we share with the other Western countries --and with the countries of the region itself -- a general interest in promoting stability and avoiding a polarization between East and West which could only do damage.

"What we want to see in Southern Africa is reduction in tension there, and peaceful evolution. For too long both our interests and those of the people of the region have been threatened by problems stemming from the impasse in Namibia and from the friction between South Africa and its neighbors. The consequent uncertainty and instability have been exploited by outsiders who seem much happier supplying machine-guns than machine tools, and whose contribution is essentially destructive.

"We, for our part, have done our best to ensure that our contribution should be the opposite of that. This has been true of the part we have played in the Western Contact Group on Namibia. And true, also, of our bilateral relations with the front line states. I am glad to see these relations developing, not only with our old friends in the Commonwealth -- where we continue to be closely involved -- but also with Angola and Mozambique.

"Our relations with the Republic of South Africa are part of this wider picture. We fully recognize that there is a very important moral issue at stake in South Africa. We wish, as much as anyone else, to see peaceful evolutionary change towards a system of Government that is firmly rooted in the principle of Government by consent of the governed. And we will continue to use all the influence we have -- though it is less than some people suppose -- to encourage peaceful reform.

"That is what our policy is based on. The cornerstone of our approach is contact. Without this we see no hope of influencing South Africa in a positive sense.

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"This approach is shared by our major Western partners. I cannot claim that it has achieved miracles: but I see no greater promise of success -- and many very serious disadvantages -- in the alternative prescriptions which have been advocated.

"Although the parallel is not a direct one I think we can take some encouragement from the example of Namibia. Progress has of course been much too slow. But the settlement plan -- which came about as a result of a remarkable collective diplomatic effort involving close cooperation between the Western Group and the front line states -- is still very much alive. Indeed the omens seem better than for same time. Similarly, there is some encouragement to be drawn from other recent events in the region, including the current talks between Mozambique and South Africa. It would be very much in the long term interests of all the people of the region if South Africa and her neighbors were to get down to practical cooperation. There are signs that this may be happening, and that cross-border violence is being seen for the short-sighted and destructive policy that it undoubtedly is whether the border is crossed from the north or from the south."

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