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FALKLANDS

**THE  
CHILEAN  
CONNECTION**



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# THE CHILE CONNECTION

*In the Falklands War, the British government claimed it was standing up to General Galtieri's dictatorship in Argentina. Foreign Secretary Francis Pym made much of Argentina's 'systematic contempt of all human rights'. He proclaimed: 'Britain does not appease dictators'. Mrs Thatcher on the Jimmy Young programme claimed: 'It's Britain who stands up for democracy'. But all the while Mrs Thatcher's government was doing secret deals with General Pinochet's government in Chile — one of the most brutally repressive régimes in South America. **Duncan Campbell** reveals how Britain gave military equipment to Pinochet and turned a blind eye to human rights violations in return for extensive clandestine help against Argentina*

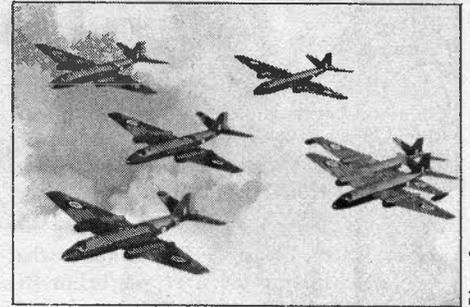


Photo Source

ARGENTINA INVADED the Falklands on 2 April 1982. Within a week a series of 'understandings' had been arranged with the Chileans through Mr John Heath, the British Ambassador in Santiago. Several civil servants and one minister in the Thatcher government at the time have confirmed to us details of Britain's secret deal with Pinochet.

The understandings were set out in a series of top secret telegrams sent by the Ambassador from Santiago to the Foreign Office in London. Two of them explicitly state that arrangements for British use of Chilean bases had the 'full approval of the President (Pinochet) and Cabinet'. Another acknowledges that, in return for Chilean military help, Britain would do its best to get the United Nations to 'lay off' Chile on human rights issues.

Under the terms of the understandings, Britain gained:

- Use of Punta Arenas, an air base in southern Chile, for RAF spy planes, disguised in Chilean markings.
- Use of Punta Arenas and other areas to infiltrate SAS special forces into Argentina for espionage and to destroy Argentine aircraft on the ground;
- A complete exchange of intelligence, including monitoring and codebreaking of Argentine signals carried out by Chilean Naval

Intelligence staff.

The Chilean government gained:

- RAF Canberra aircraft used in the secret operation, which were to be turned over the Chile when the war was over.
- A squadron of RAF Hawker Hunter aircraft, most of which was delivered to Chile after the war started.
- Britain's support in undermining United Nations investigations into Chilean human rights abuses, by opposing the reappointment of the UN's special investigators.
- The dropping of British restrictions on arms sales to Chile. (Supplies during 1982 also included enriched uranium, and the offer of a British magnox nuclear reactor: (NS 18.2.83.)

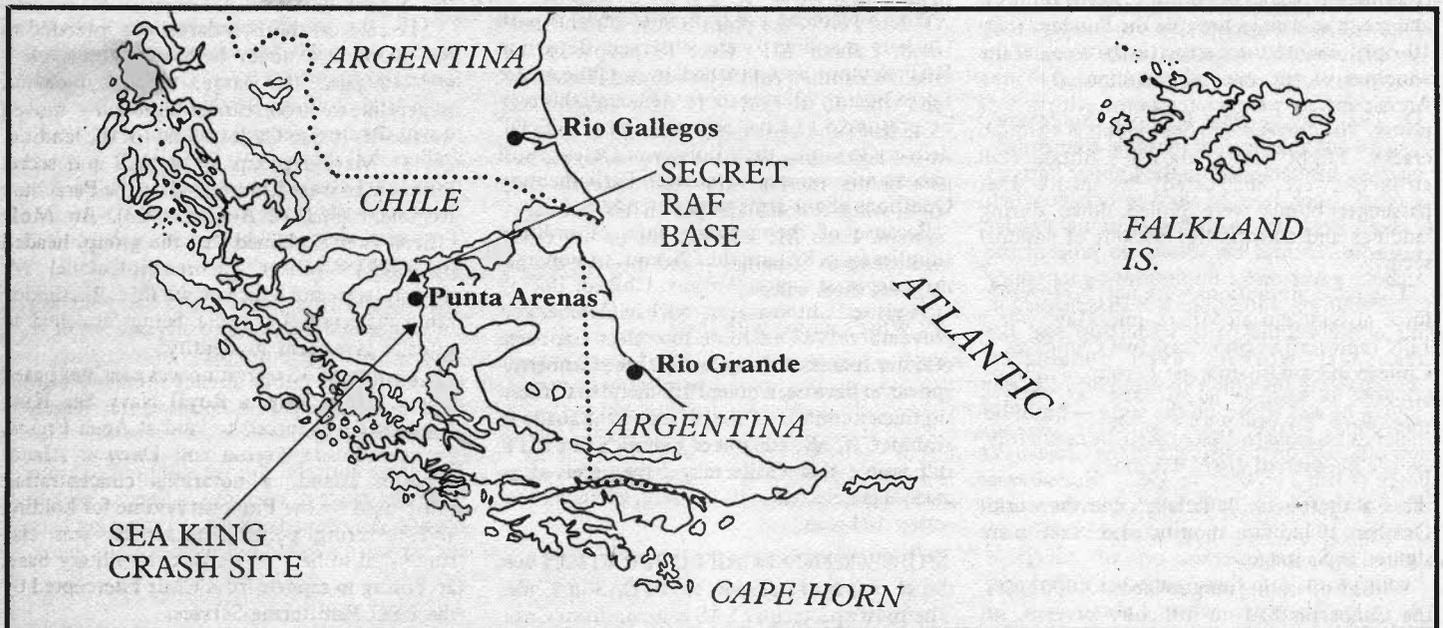
Chile was pleased with these secret arrangements. In 1982, its longstanding dispute with Argentina over the sovereignty of three small islands in the Beagle Channel, which divides the two countries as their southeastern extremities, had come to a head. General Pinochet's government hoped that a British victory in the Falklands would undermine Argentine determination to keep the islands. It did; by a subsequent peace treaty, the islands have been established as belonging to Chile.

During the Falklands War, according to a well-informed senior civil servant, the British

government made concerted attempts to keep references to the Chile deal out of British papers. The House of Commons have also repeatedly been misled about the deal with Chile; on 5 July 1982, for example, Foreign Office Minister Cranley Onslow was asked 'whether any bilateral agreements have been made between the republic of Chile and the United Kingdom during the last 12 months'. The answer, Mr Harvey Proctor was told, was 'none'. But just two months before, according to information given to the NS last week, a top secret telegram from Santiago had gone to Foreign Office Permanent Secretary Sir Antony Acland and MoD Permanent Secretary Sir Frank Cooper, expressing the Chilean Cabinet's 'satisfaction' at the benefits to Chile from the secret agreements. Both Ministries have now clammed up about Chile; MoD representatives would not deny the details of the secret understandings, asserting that 'we do not comment on operational deployments'.

PART ONE of the secret operation was the transfer of long range RAF spy planes to southern Chile. In mid-April, half a squadron

**British Canberra photoreconnaissance aircraft (similar to above) flew secretly to Chile in April 1982: En route, they were disguised in Chilean airforce markings**





Secret 'understandings': British ambassador to Chile John Heath greets General Pinochet

of Canberra PR9s, normally based at RAF Wyton near Huntingdon; were flown secretly to Belize, the ex-British colony and military base in central America. They were there repainted in Chilean Air Force markings and flew on, illegally and without clearance, over central America and on to Punta Arenas. The identity of the countries illegally overflown — probably Honduras and El Salvador — is not known for certain.

'At least' six Canberras were involved, according to official sources. The Canberra PR9 is specially built for long range, high altitude photography. At its normal operating height in excess of 60,000 feet, the Canberras were quite immune to attack by the Argentine Air Force.

The operation of the Canberras was easily concealed at Punta Arenas, where Chilean F5 jet fighters were in continual operation to keep Argentine defences stretched towards the west and south as well as towards the Falklands. By 10 April, before the Canberras arrived, all the windows of the civil air terminal at Punta Arenas airfield were whitewashed, with guards posted to prevent anyone looking through cracks. Flight crews aboard Chilean civil airliners were instructed to ensure that passenger blinds were pulled down during landings and takeoffs 'for reasons of national security'.

The same precautions were not, however, in force at Santiago airport in mid-May, where ITN reporter Jon Snow saw two Canberras in Chilean markings, amongst a group of military aircraft including heavy US Air Force transports. Two ex-RAF Canberras PR9s are now officially on the strength of the Chilean Air Force (a third crashed in 1983). But none of these aircraft were 'officially' delivered until October 1982, five months after they were sighted in Santiago.

With an operating range of about 2,000 miles, the Canberras had no difficulty covering all important Argentine targets. The three main

southern Argentine air bases — Rio Grande, Rio Gallegos, and Ushuaia, were all less than 160 miles from Punta Arenas, a mere 20 minutes flying time: Port Stanley and the Falklands, about 400 miles away, less than an hour's flight.

A top RAF intelligence expert, Group Captain David L. Edwards, went to Chile to take charge of the secret operation. Group Captain Edwards liaised directly with the Chief of the Chilean Air Force, General Fernando Matthei. Edwards was at the time the Chief Intelligence Officer at RAF Strike Command Headquarters, High Wycombe.

On 28 May 1982, with most of its Canberra aircraft in Chile, No 39 Squadron at Wyton was formally disbanded. At the beginning of 1982, it had 15 aircraft — 13 of them flying. On 28 May, only a single aircraft could be found for the memorial flypast, according to the official paper *RAF News*.

On 15 October 1982, three Canberras with Chilean markings were observed departing RAF Wyton, accompanied by a Chilean Air Force Boeing 707 transport. Although this may be presumed to have been the overt, 'official' delivery to Chile, the Ministry of Defence still persistently refuses to answer Parliamentary Questions about arms sales to Chile.

Because of the growing flow of military supplies from Britain, the Chilean Air Force set up a depot at Luton Airport. Chilean Boeing 707s visited Luton at least twice in October and November 1982 en route to collect Canberra military spares. Although only three Canberras appear to have been given 'officially' to Chile, a significant number of the old 39 Squadron aircraft have allegedly been placed 'in store'. It is possible that Chile may have received as many as six.

**THE SECOND SECRET OPERATION** was the setting up of a base for the SAS in Chile. The most spectacular SAS mission from Chile was an attempt, just before the British landings

in the Falklands on 20 May, to destroy Argentine Exocet-carrying Super Etendard aircraft on the ground at their airbase, Rio Grande. This mission has been confirmed to the NS by a member of the British government at the time.

Before ordering special forces into Argentina on such a risky sabotage mission, the Prime Minister's South Atlantic 'war cabinet', known as OD(SA), sought advice on its legality. They were told that an attack on the Argentine mainland would be legal under the terms of Article 51 of the United Nations treaty, provided the attack was 'very, very specifically' limited to military aircraft or stores which 'had been used to attack British forces'. As to the secret reconnaissance overflights, OD(SA) was also told: 'Airspace violations happen all the time'.

We have not been able to establish with certainty whether or not the SAS raid destroyed the Etendards. But early in June 1982, ITN reporter Jon Snow, who was based in Punta Arenas throughout the war, was taken to the offices of Chilean Naval Intelligence specialist, Mario Burgos. Burgos was one of a number of Chilean intelligence officials collaborating directly with the British intelligence. Snow was shown the intelligence centre at the Punta Arenas base where the Chileans tapped Argentine telex messages, and intercepted and decoded their military and naval radio signals.

On this occasion, Snow was shown a blowup of a high level aerial photograph of the apron (aircraft parking area) at Rio Grande, then the main Argentine Etendard base. Six aircraft were lined up beside the runway. Five of them were burnt-out wrecks. The photograph shown to Snow is evidence of continuing British spy flights over Argentine, though the Chilean official ascribed the photograph to their own sources.

The Argentine government never admitted any Etendard losses. (The timing of the deliveries of the 14 Etendards that Argentina originally ordered from France also remains a mystery.) What is known is that the Etendards were very seldom sent into action. Apart from the firing of one Exocet missile to sink the *Atlantic Conveyor* on 25 May, there are no reliable reports of any Etendard activities after the 20 May mission.

The raid on the Etendards was intended to put them out of action before the task force — and in particular large, difficult-to-defend targets like the troop carrier *Canberra* — moved westwards to San Carlos sound for the landing. On 11 May, a group of 14 SAS and secret service men were 'transferred' to the Parachute Regiment (*NS* 12 August 1983). An MoD official later explained that the group, headed by ex-SAS officer Lieutenant-Colonel M. Tudor, 'were not what you would call orthodox army officers'; they were being 'attached to units to give them an identity'.

The secret SAS operation was nearly exposed when, on 18 May, a Royal Navy Sea King helicopter was forced to land at Agua Fresca, between Punta Arenas and Dawson Island. Dawson Island, a notorious concentration camp used by the Pinochet regime for holding and torturing political prisoners, was also rumoured to be a secret British military base, according to reports from Chile intercepted by the BBC Monitoring Service.

The Royal Navy crew 'disappeared' for

## ANOTHER MOULD NOT BROKEN

**Sarah Benton analyses the recent revival in the Socialist Society's non-sectarian project**

THREE YEARS ago, with tremendous fanfare and considerable élan, a new Socialist Society was founded in London. 1,200 people turned up for the inaugural conference, some simply not wanting to miss out on what might turn out retrospectively to be a historic occasion, most drawn by the hope that this might begin the political dissolution of the sectarian compartments of the Left.

A key to that was to provide a new vehicle for intellectuals of the Left to engage with the Labour movement. Instead of being tied up in the peculiar requirements of their own parties, or being doomed to perpetual rootlessness in the diaspora of exiled intellectuals, a Socialist Society could bring their skills and knowledge to bear on the most important issues for socialism.

Next week, on 2-3 February, the Society meets again for its annual conference. It has succeeded in fulfilling few of the grand aims it implicitly set for itself. But in the last year its membership has doubled from its low of 150, and, like many organisations, it has been revitalised by the miners' strike (membership increases are reported across the gamut of Left organisations). Optimism about its potential is now a clearer voice in its ranks than the desperation which marked it as funds and members seemed to be slipping inexorably away in 1983.

THERE WAS from the start a massive gulf between the intensity of the desire for a Socialist Society to work and the ability to deliver a truly non-sectarian, self-sustaining organisation. That desire was fuelled by the 1980 Leeds conference on *Beyond the Fragments*, an influential book by Sheila Rowbotham, Hilary Wainwright and Lynne Segal which criticised Leninist and bureaucratic party practices as being inimical to the development of socialism. The Leeds conference was well attended, bringing together the libertarian and 'Broad' Left and attracting a high proportion of women, whose own national network of general women's liberation conferences had been irredeemably fractured by the end of the '70s. That conference failed to sustain a new network of *Beyond the Fragments* supporters (an augury of things to come), but from it came a group which went on to propose the establishment of a Socialist Society.

Months went into preparing for a perfect birth. A group in the North, including David Coates and Anthony Arblaster, drew up the ideal constitution which specified, amongst other things, that the Society should have a steering committee of 30, of whom 50 per cent had to be women. Provision was made for the plethora of socialist groups to affiliate and be

several days and were then 'discovered' walking into Punta Arenas. In fact at least one crew member was picked up after signalling to a searching Chilean Navy helicopter. Chileans digging for gold in the area who saw this happen — and who reported what they had seen to Jon Snow — were later warned by Chilean secret police to say nothing.

Although Chile issued a cosmetic note of protest to Britain about the crash, the three crew of the British helicopter were co-operatively treated and hurried out of the country. In London, the Ministry of Defence contrived to mislead the press into reporting that the helicopter was on anti-submarine operations from a task force ship and had lost its way. In fact, it was operating from Chile and carried no anti-submarine equipment.

CHILE REAPED the benefits of the secret deal within days of the Argentine invasion. Eight RAF Hunters flew to Abingdon from Brawdy in Wales by 20 April, and, like the Canberras, were repainted in Chilean colours. On 24 April and 22 May, Boeing 747 freighters of Los Angeles Flying Tiger Airlines transported the Hunters to Chile. (A third delivery in January 1983 completed the British gift to Chile of a Hunter squadron.)

RAF Hunter pilots went secretly to Chile and stayed to help 'train' the Chileans (although the Chilean Air Force had been using Hunters since the early 1970s, and had used them in the 1973 overthrow of the Allende government). One of the RAF pilots, Flight Lieutenant Richard Thomas, was killed in a crash in Chile in January 1983.

The Defence Ministry then said that his training mission was 'informal'. It did not explain how he came to be flying alone.

Warm British-Chilean military relations continued after the war. A military delegation was invited to the Aldershot arms show and another team, headed by General Matthei himself, was invited to the Farnborough Air Show as the guest of the British government. In the face of Labour and SDP protests, however, this trip was cancelled. General Matthei came instead in March 1983, where he was warmly welcomed and thanked for his help by the Royal Air Force Chief of Staff, Air Marshall Sir Keith Williamson.

In September 1982, Trade Minister Peter Rees led a British trade delegation to Santiago, where — on the 9th anniversary of Pinochet's coup, and in the face of evidently worsening human rights abuses — Rees sang the dictator's praises. Chile, he said was 'a moderate and stabilising force' in South America; Britain looked to 'deepening and strengthening political relations'.

At the same time the head of the Chilean nuclear agency, General Juan Brady visited Britain and the UK Atomic Energy Authority. He was offered a magnox nuclear reactor and widespread nuclear collaboration. Later that year, 40 enriched uranium fuel rods were sent to Chile for work in a 'research reactor'.

Britain's most recent gift to Chile was an Antarctic base, Adelaide Island. The Chilean government has denied reports in Argentina that, in return, Britain has been given permanent rights to use a remote Chilean air base, Diego Ramirez.

In December 1982, Britain attempted to

undermine United Nations investigations of Chilean human rights violations. Since 1973, the General Assembly had annually condemned Chilean abuses of human rights. Since 1975, the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva had organised annual reports on Chile. In a UN subcommittee, Britain argued that a resolution continuing the mandate of the 'Special Rapporteur' on Chile was unnecessary. The amendment was passed by the subcommittee, but was spotted — and defeated — on the floor of the General Assembly.

Then, faced with an undiluted UN resolution condemning the 'persistence of serious and systematic violations of human rights in Chile, and calling on Chile 'to restore democratic institutions', Britain abstained. It was the first time since the *coup d'état* that Britain failed to vote to condemn in the General Assembly the tens of thousands of deaths and 'disappearances', the million plus political exiles, and the absence of human and political rights in Pinochet's Chile. (In 1983, Britain again abstained on this motion. In 1984, however, we voted for the anti-Pinochet resolution; the Foreign Office remit to present Pinochet's case to the world had, evidently, expired.)

WE HAVE CONFIRMED details of the Chilean connection with many sources. All say that, inside the government, it was 'the most sensitive subject' of the war. At first, although classified top secret, knowledge of the Chilean operation was fairly widely disseminated inside the Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence. By late April 1982, however, information on Chile was restricted to a tiny group. British spy planes were by then routinely flying from Chile.

The Defence Ministry became alarmed by a number of press leaks on Chile, and the Secretary of the 'D Notice' Committee, Admiral William Ash, was asked to help ensure that nothing was reported, according to a senior defence official. In regular 'off the record' briefings on the course of the war by MoD Permanent Secretary Sir Frank Cooper, Fleet Street editors were also warned that Chile was 'sensitive': 'Don't mention it, please' was the message, one editor said this week.

Since the war, a number of important figures have publicly confirmed aspects of the understandings. Lord Lewin, the then Chief of the Defence Staff, stated in a recorded interview with Arthur Gavshon, author of the *Sinking Of the Belgrano*, that British forces 'got some information from Chileans'. In the House of Commons on 24 November 1982, then Foreign Secretary Francis Pym said unguardedly that 'Chile was quite helpful to us in the conflict and we ought to bear that in mind when we consider our relations now'.

Labour shadow ministers are not prepared to extend the same benign tolerance to the Chilean dictatorship as Mrs Thatcher. 'The Prime Minister is willing to sacrifice any principle to save her face', front bench spokesman on Latin America George Foulkes MP said this week. 'Her hypocrisy is amazing — she is unwilling to negotiate with a democratic government in Argentina, but remains willing to do dirty deals with a dictatorship'. □

*Additional research by Duncan Green and Jolyon Jenkins.*