
Interview: Panama's Foreign Minister



'It would be legitimate for Argentina not to pay the debt'

Following is the text of the interview given by Jorge Illueca, Panama's Foreign Minister, to Dennis Small, Latin American Editor of EIR on May 28, 1982, at the Organization of American States in Washington, D.C.

Small: Panama has been one of the countries which has most supported the Argentine position in the Malvinas crisis. Why?

Illueca: In the first place, because Panama has a tradition which dates back to the Congress of Panama of 1826, which was held on the basis of Hispanic American independence which was, of course, an idea of Bolivar's. And since then, Panama has always had a great concern to promote the unity and integration of Latin America.

Small: In other words, you are saying that the current crisis is an attack by an extra-hemispheric force against the entire Inter-American system. Are we speaking, then, of a violation of the Rio Treaty [TIAR]?

Illueca: Yes. In reality what has come out of the debates in the OAS today is that it is as much a violation of TIAR as it is also a violation of Article 19 of the Charter of the Organization of American States, in terms of the action taken by the United States to levy sanctions on Argentina. In reality, in accordance with the Charter of the OAS, it was similarly not permissible for the United States to unilaterally impose sanctions which are measures of coercion against a country of the region.

Small: Do you think that the Monroe Doctrine is applicable in the Malvinas case?

Illueca: The President of my country, Dr. Aristides Royo, in a letter which he sent to President Reagan this week, recalls for him that the original *raison d'être* of the Monroe Doctrine was to oppose the actions of the Holy Alliance aimed at Spain's recovery of its colonies in America. But this doctrine was twisted afterwards by various actions of the United States, which used it as a means to justify its own expansionism. And many of the corollaries of the doctrine have been in conflict with the interests of the countries of Latin America. However, the Monroe Doctrine came into being to protect the United States and the Latin American region against foreign

domination, against colonialism. The demonstration that this is a doctrine which has been unilaterally applied depending on the character of the Presidents which the United States has had, is seen in the fact that the doctrine was proclaimed in the message of President Monroe in 1823, and the British action to dislodge the Argentines from the Malvinas Islands and occupy them against the Argentines' will, took place in 1833—ten years after the Monroe Doctrine.

It's clear that the United States' position on this problem has even gone against what it had itself declared in the past, since it is now promoting, encouraging, helping a colonial project which comes from an extra-continental power. In Latin America, there is the impression—which indeed is well founded—that England has only been able to exercise such aggressive action as it has, 8,000 miles from its territory, due to the support that the United States has provided it. This has created a great deal of resentment in Latin America, resentment made even more profound by the announcement yesterday that the United States was supplying England with ground-to-air and air-to-air missiles, to try to destroy the efforts Argentina is making to defend itself. That is, there has been an alliance of the United States with Britain to destroy Argentina. This is the feeling that exists in Latin America.

Small: In the last meeting of NATO, a final communiqué was adopted justifying "out of area" deployments. Do you think that the Malvinas war sets a precedent?

Illueca: In reality, what you refer to clearly represents a problem which has strategic implications. It's a kind of policy that affects the rights of sovereign countries over their geographic and natural resources if they are considered strategically important. Thus, the Malvinas are considered important as one of the strategic points for controlling the sea lanes of the South Atlantic. Of course, it is unfair that Argentina not be allowed to exercise its sovereignty over those islands, just because the members of NATO prefer that one of their members, Great Britain, be in control of them, even against Argentina's legitimate rights.

In truth, the matter is more profound, because the

United States has been acting against the backdrop of contractual agreements that it has with the countries of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and also agreements it has with the Latin American countries through TIAR. As I mentioned to you during our last conversation, Admiral Harry Train, for example, the head of the U.S. Atlantic fleet and the head of NATO's naval forces, made a statement in mid-April to the effect that the NATO Treaty did not obligate the United States to come to the aid of Great Britain, because that treaty applies only above the equator. However, he said that Argentina could invoke TIAR, because within the terms of TIAR there is, as you know—and I am speaking now for myself, not citing Admiral Train—a security zone, a maritime zone, a geographic zone of security that is defined by Article 4 of the Rio Treaty. If you take a look at the official maps published by the OAS, the Malvinas are included within this zone. In proclaiming an exclusion zone around the Malvinas, Great Britain is in violation of the Rio Treaty.

However, the United States has adopted an attitude that is incomprehensible for the other states that are members of the Rio Treaty. It has determined that all this is legitimate; it has determined that it is legitimate that Great Britain, after committing a criminal act, sinking the cruiser General Belgrano outside the zone that they had proclaimed, could then think that it could cover this up by extending its exclusion zone to within 12 miles of the Argentine coast, and even by endangering navigation on the Rio de la Plata, which effects countries such as Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay. All of these things are beyond the comprehension of the Latin Americans, and have caused great traumas in the region. Even Reagan administration officials have expressed their concern, because this has signified a setback in the relations between Latin America and the United States, due to the policy of the United States on this issue.

We are truly concerned, because as we have said publicly, it is important for our countries to have harmonic relations with the United States. There was always the sense in Latin America, and the United States itself used to stress this, that it was not necessary to transfer technology, particularly military technology, to the countries of Latin America, nor to transfer sophisticated weapons, because the defense of the continent was in U.S. hands. They said it was not necessary that money that could be used for other things, be spent on weapons.

I believe that there has been a reaction now. I believe that all of the countries of Latin America will find it quite legitimate to arm themselves, in order to defend themselves. Because in situations such as these, the country which was always considered a friend, the country whose democratic institutions have been an example for the world, has taken paths hostile to Latin America and now constitute, truly, a threat to its own security.

Small: So, in terms of TIAR, joint sanctions by Latin American nations against England are now justified under the TIAR treaty. I would like to know what is being discussed in this regard here in the OAS. Second, I would like to know your opinion about the proposal of Lyndon LaRouche, the well-known U.S. Democratic Party politician, who has proposed that Latin America use its foreign debt as a weapon to force the British to reconsider their activities in the South Atlantic.

Illueca: The draft resolution which is being studied at this very hour by the working group (of the OAS), includes of course a condemnation of the British aggression against Argentina and of the colonial policy of Britain. It also contains a decision in terms of demanding that the United States cease the materiel and weapons aid that it is providing Britain. The European Economic Community is called upon likewise to cease the sanctions that it has imposed. There is a paragraph in which the member states of TIAR are authorized to take the measures which they deem necessary regarding sanctions against those countries which are attacking Argentina. What kind of sanctions are not specified. I think that later on there will have to be a meeting among the countries which are ready to proceed in this manner, to determine how to act.

As for Mr. LaRouche's proposal, I believe that it is a very important proposal for any official of a Latin American government. It is a very touchy question to suggest that one is not going to fulfill obligations that one has contracted. However, in the very special case of Great Britain, the fact is that Great Britain has frozen funds not just of the Argentine government, but also of private companies and individuals. I have no doubt that it would be perfectly legitimate for Argentina not to pay the debts that it has contracted with Britain or British banks, because it would simply be responding to an aggressive action which Britain has taken against Argentina.

As for the other Latin American countries which have debts of great magnitude, which are particularly Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela, we must be very respectful of their sovereignty and we could not anticipate their actions. Of course, it is a tremendous weapon. I believe LaRouche has put his finger on the wound, because our experience tells us that the economic factor is much more painful for certain countries than, even, the killing of some of their citizens. But I can tell you that any measure of this kind would have to be the result of multilateral action.

The Latin American Economic System (SELA) will be meeting this upcoming week, on Tuesday or Wednesday, to consider what economic measures are going to be taken to assist Argentina, and also to take action to respond to the economic sanctions which have been levied against Argentina. I believe that many ideas are probably going to come out of that forum.