

55. **Telegram From the Embassy in Argentina to the Department of State¹**

Buenos Aires, April 2, 1982, 2223Z

1946. Subject: The Politics of the Malvinas Adventure.

1. Confidential—Entire text.

2. Summary: This is a preliminary assessment of the politics involved in the invasion of the Falklands/Malvinas. President Galtieri hopes to use this adventure to buy political time, solidify his authority and stay in office through 1987. Given those prizes to win, the calculated gamble and the international costs involved must have seemed worth it. Once the popular euphoria wears off, however, the same problems of deep economic recession and the unpopularity of the military government will remain. Still, Galtieri undoubtedly feels himself in a strong

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, D820176-0629. Confidential; Immediate; Exdis. Sent for information to Brasilia, London, Montevideo, and Santiago.

position for the moment, strong enough perhaps even to make some concessions on Argentina's other longstanding external dispute, that of the Beagle Channel. End summary.

3. The invasion of the Malvinas is a calculated gamble designed in part to gain Galtieri what is called here "political space" and ultimately to entrench him in power. The latter objective includes extension of his term as CINC of the army beyond his normal retirement date at the end of the year and "re-election" as President for another three years in 1984. During the last six weeks the regime has come under steadily increasing pressure from the political parties, industrialists, labor unions and other organized groups as Roberto Alemann's stabilization program has begun to hurt. The frustrated CGT rally on March 31, the first mass demonstration of consequence since 1976, must have been all too vivid a reminder to the military of what can happen to government authority in the streets of Buenos Aires.²

4. As soon as the news of the landings was released, the GOA launched a massive campaign to promote national unity and national rejoicing. The effort has so far included rallies throughout the country, a new song for the occasion, "Malvinas Argentinas", played endlessly on radio and television, flags everywhere, a Galtieri appearance before the masses in the Plaza de Mayo a La Peron, and statements of enthusiastic support elicited from every Argentine personage of any conceivable importance. (The only slightly skeptical voice has been that of former Foreign Minister Oscar Camilion whose fall from office with Viola was a serious setback to hopes for moderation and intelligence in this country's foreign policy). The release of those labor leaders still being held as a result of the events of March 31 so that they too could join in the celebration was further evidence of the effort to open political space.

5. These glittering rewards to be won must have helped persuade Galtieri and his colleague Admiral Anaya (a prime mover in this operation) that the risks were worth taking. British military power was a long way away, and, they could well have calculated, if the British do react militarily, HMG will be hard put to maintain at such a great distance and for so much time the considerable force needed to oust the Argentines and keep them out. The GOA knew from our representations that there would be a high price to pay in terms of relations with the US. But Galtieri seems to think that the Central American connection

² In telegram 1835 from Buenos Aires, March 31, the Embassy reported that with "a massive display of force" the Argentine Government "frustrated scheduled rallies by the General Confederation of Labor (CGT) and crushed a series of related demonstrations" across the country on March 30. (Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, D820170-0509)

and the *fait accompli* in the Malvinas will mitigate that in time. (There is also much talk here at the moment about the Israeli example of how to do these things and get away with them.) Otherwise internationally the GOA appears persuaded that it will have ample support, or at least tolerance, from other Latin Americans, the NAM and the Soviet bloc.

6. How much political space Galtieri has brought himself is open to question. If the Malvinas operation is less than the promised quick success, the President could soon come under fire, although appeals for national unity in a prolonged crisis will not go unheard. In any event, once the euphoria has worn off, the same problems will remain: an unpopular government and a sick economy. In the circumstances, Roberto Alemann's stabilization program may well be a casualty. The Malvinas adventure will cost a lot of money and the temptation to return to populist policies will be strong. Liberalization may be another casualty. The GOA has already shown a tendency toward toughness when challenged in its reactions on March 31. Tolerance in that quarter of further labor demonstrations and political dissidence in general is not likely to be great. We are already hearing from some in the military that further moves toward a political should be postponed.

7. With all that, Galtieri is for the moment riding high. He has some political space and will now be very difficult to move out of the army command at the end of the year. It is also worth noting that Galtieri has positioned himself to make a genuine try to resolve the Beagle dispute, Argentina's other longstanding external problem. Having recovered "national patrimony", at least temporarily, and having assured himself in Argentine history, Galtieri could make some concessions on the Beagle. He could also, of course, prove more difficult than ever after successfully flexing the country's military muscles.

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