

**64. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Clark) to President Reagan<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, April 6, 1982

SUBJECT

US Role in Preventing UK-Argentine Clash

*Issue*

What should be the US role in preventing a UK-Argentine clash?

*Facts*

Secretary Haig believes and I concur that an armed conflict between the UK and Argentina would be seriously damaging to US interests. Accordingly, we have a major stake in doing what we can to avert such conflict and contribute to a peaceful settlement of the dispute. (S)

*Discussion*

Al Haig believes that our best hope for a constructive role which also keeps the Soviets out of the picture lies in an OAS peacekeeping initiative. His memo (Tab A) sets forth an "honest broker" scenario whereby we quietly sound out both the British and the Argentines with an eye toward assessing the chances of a successful OAS role. (S)

I think Al's recommendation is useful. He recognizes the risks of such an undertaking, which at this point seem significant (given likely British reservations about the OAS, together with the inflexible domestic politics driving Argentina's present course, I would rate our chances of success less than 50-50.) Nevertheless, the initiative is certainly worth trying. (S)

Though Al's proposal is only a first step, an unstated premise of this approach is that the United States may well play a major role in resolving the dispute. It will not be easy and the chances of alienating both countries are possible. Nevertheless, no one else can or will play this role, and without substantial US involvement, the likelihood of a peaceful resolution of the dispute diminishes substantially. You should thus be aware that we could be poised on the brink of a major commitment and that a decision to go forward ought to be taken deliberately—fully aware of possible costs and consequences. (S)

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Reagan Library, Executive Secretariat, NSC Country File, Latin America/Central, Argentina (04/03/1982-04/06/1982). Secret. Prepared by Rentschler, Fontaine, and Blair. Rentschler and Fontaine sent the memorandum to Clark under an April 6 covering note recommending that Clark sign it. (Ibid.)

## RECOMMENDATION

That you approve Al Haig's recommendation (Tab A) subject to careful monitoring as we process with the problem.<sup>2</sup>

### Tab A

#### **Memorandum From Secretary of State Haig to President Reagan<sup>3</sup>**

Washington, April 5, 1982

#### SUBJECT

US Role in Preventing UK-Argentine Clash

You have made clear publicly that the US is willing to serve as an honest broker between the UK and Argentina.<sup>4</sup> With the British fleet on its way south, we have at most two weeks before possible conflict, although a UK submarine may reach the area by April 12.

A military clash between these two friends of ours would be a major setback to our national interests. It would engage British forces far from the European theater. An unsuccessful endeavor by the British to retake the Islands could bring down the Government, resulting in a government in London that would be much less supportive of US interests than that of Mrs. Thatcher. We remain dependent upon close ties with the UK as we pursue our global objectives. Moreover, a clash would divert world attention from the real threats to peace and jeopardize our belief that disputes should be settled without recourse to force whether they be in the Middle East or the South Atlantic. At the same time, a clash could result in closer Argentine-Soviet ties and further undermine the new relationship we have forged with the government in Buenos Aires.

Superficially, a UN role might appear to be attractive. However, while we are satisfied with the UN vote on the UK resolution on the

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<sup>2</sup> Reagan neither approved nor disapproved the recommendation.

<sup>3</sup> Secret; Nodis.

<sup>4</sup> During a question-and-answer session with reporters in the Oval Office, April 5, Reagan was asked: "Have you accepted the role as honest broker in the Falkland Islands dispute, sir?" Reagan responded: "If we can be of help in doing that, yes, anything that would bring a peaceful solution to what seems to be an unnecessary disagreement." (*Public Papers: Reagan, 1982, Book I, pp. 431*)

Falklands,<sup>5</sup> we see little chance that the issue can be resolved in a UN context. This is particularly true because of the Soviet veto.

We believe the best hope for preventing further fighting and for keeping the Soviets out lies in an OAS peacemaking role. This would be consonant with the collective approach to security we have tried to encourage in Central America. Inevitably there would be both dangers and opportunities in invoking the Rio Treaty.<sup>6</sup> If the Treaty is invoked, and we block the process, the OAS would be damaged at the same time we are trying to reinforce it. This would detract from our ability to turn to it in the Central America context. Conversely, if it can be used successfully, we will have strengthened the Pact and made it a good example of ways in which a regional security treaty can benefit all nations.

Such an OAS initiative could include a separation of forces, as well as withdrawal of Argentine forces now on the Falklands and OAS administration of the Islands while a permanent solution is negotiated. In order to make such an OAS role acceptable to the British, we would have to put Americans on the Islands as part of an OAS mission. If this proposal prospers, it may be desirable for you to name a distinguished American to play a lead role under OAS auspices in achieving a negotiated settlement.<sup>7</sup>

At this point we should keep our role as unstructured as possible. We need to determine the interest of both sides before making a more specific proposal. It is clear that the UK will scrutinize carefully an initiative that involves an organization of which it is not a member.

*Recommendation:*

Following up on your expressed willingness to see the US be an honest broker, that you authorize us to sound out the British and Argentine governments quietly. While we would wish to keep our options open, we would intend to explore initially an OAS peacemaking role in which we would play a leading part.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See footnote 3, Document 50.

<sup>6</sup> See footnote 4, Document 50.

<sup>7</sup> Reagan highlighted this sentence by drawing two parallel lines in the right-hand margin.

<sup>8</sup> Reagan signed his approval of the recommendation. In contrast to this memorandum, an April 5 CIA memorandum for the record covering subjects discussed by Haig and Inman at their April 5 breakfast meeting, records the following about their discussion of the Falklands/Malvinas: "There was general discussion and both sides agreed that the U.S. must support the British." (Central Intelligence Agency, Office of the Director of Central Intelligence, Job 89B00224R, Committees, Task Forces, Boards, and Councils Files, Box 11, Memos for the Record of Mtgs w/Sec and DepSec of State (Apr 81-Dec 85))