

89. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Buenos Aires, April 9, 1982, 5:30 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

President Galtieri, Argentina
Ambassador Vernon Walters

At 5:30 pm on April 9, 1982 under instructions from Secretary Haig, I met with President Leopold Galtieri alone at the Casa Rosada in Buenos Aires.

I explained that I came at Secretary Haig's request to convey privately some thoughts to consider before our general discussion later in the evening.² We understood that President Galtieri had unified his people in a way none of his predecessors could. His mandate in the Malvinas affair is clearly broad and sound. If we can resolve the matter without war, Galtieri will go down in Argentine history as the man who reconquered the Malvinas Islands without firing a shot. He will be perceived as a leader of the free world and a man of peace. If his government accepts a proposal that is recognized as reasonable and fair his place in history is secure even if the British reject it. A war between Argentina and England will serve only the Soviets and their allies.

If President Galtieri insists upon having an Argentine governor of the Malvinas during an interim negotiating period, the effort to avoid war will surely fail. There is clearly an honorable and demonstrably important role for his representative on the islands during negotiations. If he would not insist upon having his own governor, we would insist that the negotiations conclude by December 31, 1982 and in a manner to suit his domestic needs.

Both sides must make concessions if peace is to continue. History, however, seems to favor the Argentines. The matter has been pending for 130 years and has now come to a head. An interim arrangement can hardly be seen as anything other than progress for Argentina. Most of the islanders appear to want to leave if Argentina gains control. Those who remain can be accommodated.

¹ Source: Department of State, Executive Secretariat, Files of Alexander M. Haig, Jr., 1981-1982, Lot 82D370, (2) Falklands Crisis-1982. Secret; Sensitive.

² Presumably a reference to Haig's anticipated arrival in Buenos Aires from London the evening of April 9. Although no memorandum of conversation of their meeting has been found, Costa Méndez met Haig upon his arrival at the airport. (Edward Schumacher, "Haig, in Buenos Aires, Says U.S. Ties With Argentina Form Basis for Talks," *New York Times*, April 10, p. 6)

The British must have a face-saving solution. Mrs. Thatcher is determined that Argentina not be perceived as achieving through arms what it failed to achieve through negotiations. Insistence upon an Argentine governor will surely send the British into combat. Our assessment is that they might lose some ships but their nuclear submarines and surface combatants could seriously damage the Argentine Navy and seal off the sea and air access to the Malvinas. The 9000 Argentine troops would find life quite difficult. The Argentine choice today is to accept a half loaf now and wait to gain the rest in a year or to face a war. We are working on a draft we hope he will find acceptable.

President Galtieri replied, "Walters, the one thing you cannot ask me to do is to haul down the Argentine flag. If I do that, I will be kicked out of this building. You must work out something that does not leave me empty-handed." He did not mention the Argentine governor.

President Galtieri abruptly changed the conversation to ask if I had, indeed, gone to Cuba to see Fidel Castro as the papers reported.³ I answered affirmatively and said I carried a tough message warning him to cease and desist from the activities we found unacceptable. Galtieri asked about Castro's reaction. I replied that he was not happy but, surprisingly, did not bluster about. He was quite calm, almost intimidated. Galtieri then asked about Castro's appearance, behavior, and attitudes. I answered briefly.

He thanked me for my visit, asked me not to hesitate to call him, if I felt it necessary, and sent his regards to Secretary Haig.

³ For documentation relating to Walters's trip to Cuba, see *Foreign Relations*, 1981–1988, vol. XVII, Part 1, Mexico; Western Caribbean.