

130. Telegram From Secretary of State Haig to President Reagan¹

April 16, 1982, 0330Z

Secto 6020. Subject: Falkland Islands Crisis.

1. The situation has become distinctly more ominous. I base this assesment on several recent developments:

A. Today's Argentine press has an especially dark tone. Despite the fact that the British fleet is now entering the South Atlantic, Argentine commentary has become more inflexible and bellicose. This may be a response to British rhetoric and yesterday's tragic revelations about US intelligence and logistical support for the UK. More than anything, it betrays a self-hypnotizing war hysteria that may be taking over in Buenos Aires, with the prospect of military defeat, political isolation, and economic ruin eclipsed by patriotic fervor.

B. I have also received the first detailed Argentine negotiating proposal. Although this gives us a clearer framework in which to engage the Argentines, the substance is little different than their basic demand all along: Control of the Falklands, *de facto*, if not *de jure*.

2. An optimist might argue that these signs reflect posturing for what both sides know is the final round. This may be especially true of Buenos Aires with me enroute there to extract concessions. A pessimist would take these developments on face value, based on the premise that rational statesmanship gives way to more powerful impulses—not easily controlled by the leaders themselves—as war grows more imminent.

3. As I see it, the truth is probably somewhere in between. I should have a much clearer fix on the Argentine state-of-mind by late tomorrow. But we should begin to prepare ourselves for the worst.

4. In this regard, I may need very soon to seek your decisions on two critical questions.

A. Whether and how far to push Mrs. Thatcher to come forth with a significant concession?

B. Whether and how to break off this mission if its futility becomes clear?

5. On the first question, I am beginning to think that our only hope is that the British will come to realize that they cannot, in any event, resist the course of history and that they are now paying the price for

¹ Source: Reagan Library, Executive Secretariat, NSC Cable File, Falkland File 04/16/1982 (1). Secret; Sensitive; Immediate; Nodis. Sent for information Immediate to the Department of State. Sent from the Secretary's aircraft.

previous UK vacillation on the question of sovereignty. It is still too soon to say whether they will be able to make a major move by accepting local conditions that permit evolutionary change on the Islands. This, of course, would risk an ultimate change in the Islands' status as a result of a more open and natural process of self-determination than the British have thus far been willing to permit. Whether you should, or could, push Mrs. Thatcher to this bitter conclusion—with all that it would mean to her, our relationship, and our own principles—will require very careful thought.

6. On the second question, we must think—and think quickly—about whether there is value in continuing this process and our role even though it will lead nowhere.

It may well be that the Argentines make significant concessions and adopt a position that is fair and reasonable when seen in the historical context of this crisis. In that case, we should certainly go on to London and be prepared to place heavy pressure on the British, recognizing the costs but assessing the alternative—war—as worse. The burden of flexibility, and the onus for failure to achieve a peaceful outcome, will then be squarely on the British. If the Argentines are intransigent, we will have to consider having me return to Washington. We may find that we are not in a position to make a basic decision on our role until after a full round in both Buenos Aires and London. But we must be ready to decide as early as this time tomorrow.

7. At this point, the odds of avoiding war still appear very long. We could reach a flash-point at any time.

Haig