

161. Information Memorandum From the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Montgomery) to Secretary of State Haig¹

Washington, April 21, 1982

SUBJECT

Latin American Attitudes Toward the Falkland Islands Crisis

Summary: Popular opinion throughout Latin America has supported Argentina's claim to the Falkland Islands, but Hemisphere governments have been reluctant to legitimize the use of force. Reactions to the Argentine invasion among Latin American countries have varied according to the interests of individual states and their perceptions of their relationships with Buenos Aires.

Brazil fears that the conflict, if left to run its course, will bring down Galtieri and greatly increase Soviet and Cuban influence in Argentina. At the same time, senior Brazilian officials worry that an Argentine victory would revive Argentine militarism and historical tensions between Brazil and Argentina. Brazil's posture of cautious support for Argentina's claim is governed by its perception of the growing but still fragile friendship with its southern neighbor.² Brazil wants to avoid being seen as an adversary by Argentina and has agreed to sell six patrol aircraft to Buenos Aires. The longer the dispute remains unresolved and the greater the potential for conflict becomes, the more pressure Brazil will feel publicly to side with Argentina.

Chile has supported Argentina's claim to the Falklands, but the Pinochet government is concerned that the Argentine invasion will set a precedent for resolving the Beagle Channel dispute by force. The Chileans look to the US—through mediation—or to the UK—through military victory—to demonstrate to Buenos Aires that force cannot be used with impunity. Santiago wants to avoid any indication of bias, but its sympathies probably lie with the British. It has increased its military readiness in the extreme south in case hostilities break out.

Peru, as Argentina's staunchest ally in South America, quickly justified the seizure of the Falklands and offered moral support. [less than 1 line not declassified] the Peruvian military has contingency plans to aid their

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, P820066-0656. Secret; Noform; Nocontract; Orcon. Drafted by W. Lofstrom (INR/IAA). Haig initialed the upper right-hand corner of the memorandum, indicating that he saw it. A stamped notation also indicates that Haig saw the memorandum.

² Haig placed a checkmark in the right-hand margin next to this sentence.

Argentine allies if fighting occurs, but Peruvian units would not move without Belaunde's explicit order.

Colombia supports Argentina's claim to the Falklands but has condemned the Argentine invasion. It has a territorial dispute with Venezuela and also fears that Nicaragua might act militarily to assert its claim to San Andres and Providencia Islands. Colombia, therefore, wants to avoid legitimizing the use of force in territorial disputes.

Venezuela's initial reaction to the Argentine invasion was cautious, but official sympathy for Argentina has come to the fore. Venezuela's position is largely the result of the similarity it sees between the British position in the Falklands and Guyana's possession—as the result of British colonialism—of extensive areas that Venezuela claims for itself.

Mexico's position is that Argentina has the historic right to demand decolonization of the Falklands, but that it erred by disregarding the doctrine of peaceful settlement of disputes. President Lopez Portillo publicly endorsed UN mediation on April 12 when he reiterated Mexico's sympathy with Argentina's aims but not its methods.

Nicaragua and El Salvador support the Argentine takeover. Managua stated on April 5 that Argentine efforts to resolve the "illegal" colonial occupation by negotiation had failed. On the same day, El Salvador announced that Argentine aspirations were "legitimate," but it urged both parties to settle the matter peacefully.

Costa Rica wants to avoid alienating either side. Guatemala announced its support for the Argentine invasion and drew a parallel between the Argentine claim to the Falklands and Guatemala's claim to Belize.

Prime Minister Price of Belize supports the British. He fears that the upcoming withdrawal of British troops from Belize will make it an inviting target for reassertion of the Guatemalan claim.

English-speaking Caribbean countries have been cautious but generally supportive of the UK. Guyana, fearful of Venezuelan irredentism, also has given strong public support to the UK position.

With regard to invoking TIAR, Trinidad-Tobago and Haiti are the only Rio Treaty signatories in the Caribbean. Trinidad-Tobago has maintained a cautious but firm position of calling for the withdrawal of Argentine troops from the Falklands; Haiti probably will support Argentina's call for invoking the Rio Treaty.