

184. Information Memorandum From the Director of the Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs (Burt) to Secretary of State Haig¹

Washington, April 27, 1982

SUBJECT

U.S. Contingency Planning for the Falklands Crisis

If fighting erupts between the UK and Argentina, we will need to preserve what we can of our diplomatic objectives and to limit the damage to our broader foreign policy. It would be essential that a British defeat be avoided and in our best interest to facilitate a quick and decisive British victory. We will want to proceed in a way, however, that will strengthen the role of diplomacy during the conflict and contain the long-term damage to our Latin American policy.

Introduction

This memorandum surveys the military support and operational options available to us which could:

- help avert a British defeat (or stalemate) and facilitate a quick, decisive British victory if hostilities erupt;
- protect U.S. citizens and property in Argentina (and elsewhere in Latin America) from reprisal;
- block Soviet efforts to use its forces to play a direct military or political role during the crisis.

The memorandum is based on informal discussions with DOD representatives (which were arranged after considerable arm-twisting, including your personal intervention). Although these exchanges proved very useful, they were confined to generalities because Cap has ordered that no detailed information or written analyses be provided to the Department without his prior personal approval.²

Diplomatic Stakes and Objectives

A British defeat in the Falklands would have a devastating effect on the political coherence and military effectiveness of the Alliance, as well as risk undermining the special relationship and Britain's unique ability to be a bridge across the Atlantic. A prolonged conflict, which

¹ Source: Department of State, Executive Secretariat, S/S Special Handling Restrictions Memos 1979–1983, Lot 96D262, ES Sensitive April 10–19 1982. Top Secret; Sensitive. A stamped notation at the top of the memorandum indicates that Haig saw it. Below the stamped initials, Haig wrote: “*Right on.*”

² On the origin of these State-Defense discussions, see Document 171. No records of these discussions have been found.

bled the British Treasury and toppled the Thatcher government, would be just as bad.

Open, and possibly substantial, support for the British undoubtedly would damage our relations and policies in Latin America and possibly expose U.S. citizens and property in Argentina to reprisals. But our stakes in Latin America as well as in Europe argue that we should be prepared to do what we can to ensure that the result is a quick UK victory rather than prolonged stalemate. A more restrained U.S. approach could spawn a continuing, inconclusive conflict which not only toppled Thatcher, but also multiplied opportunities for Soviet mischief and steadily increased the pressure on Chile, Brazil and other potentially sympathetic Latin American countries to turn against us. In brief, a prompt British victory could go a long way toward limiting the long-term damage to our Latin American policy.

Summary Conclusions

The information supplied by DOD substantially confirmed the conclusions of our April 24 memorandum to you on this subject:³

—*We are unlikely to receive British requests for support which go much beyond what we already are providing:* The UK force is largely self-sufficient and is capable of being re-supplied using UK assets. Moreover, because of incompatibilities between U.S. and UK inventories, we are not in a good position to provide spares, ammunition, etc. Finally, we do not know what the British plan of operations is, but it is very unlikely to depend for success on favorable U.S. responses to requests for assistance which have not yet been broached with us.

—*U.S. options to deploy the posture forces in the area are very limited.* Absent access to bases in the area, the leading candidate would be naval assets, especially one or both CVBGs participating in the Ocean Venture naval exercise in the Caribbean. Steaming time, however, would be on the order of 18 days from a decision to redeploy. B-52 operations (including maritime reconnaissance) are feasible, but difficult and complex.

—*Soviet options are probably no better.* They, [less than 1 line not declassified] would be largely limited to providing intelligence and reconnaissance support. Their options, however, would be considerably expanded if the Argentines permitted the Soviets access to the air facilities and/or accepted Soviet advisors or crews.

—*The major decisions you are likely to face in the next several days about military support and deployments will be concerned with relocating U.S. naval assets.*

³ See Document 171.

The basis for these conclusions is presented in the following sections on:

- U.S. support for British military operations;
- U.S. options to counter Argentine threats to U.S. citizens and property;
- Soviet options and possible U.S. counters;
- Considerations bearing on decisions to redeploy U.S. naval assets.

Support for the UK

The U.S. could offer three broad categories of support to the UK: logistical support, political-military posturing, and airlift. (Direct combat support is not considered in this memorandum.)⁴

In the case of *logistic support*, we have not had many requests to date; nor do we anticipate them. UK forces appear to be relatively self-sufficient except for JP-5 fuel, which we are resupplying, and isolated exceptions such as Stinger and runway matting (for possible use in constructing an airfield on South Georgia or conceivably in the Falklands). Moreover, many UK items which might become critically short are not items which we could replace, e.g., even their Harriers and ours are not compatible. Only a major military reversal or an unanticipated problem/difficulty would be likely to generate substantial requests for U.S. military equipment.

Political-military posturing might be provided by flying reconnaissance aircraft [*1 line not declassified*]. Moving a carrier battle group to the vicinity of the Falklands would require several weeks and would upset currently planned deployments.⁵ Reconnaissance aircraft missions could be initiated more quickly, but the difficult, complex B-52 maritime patrol missions would provide more a political symbol than a military contribution to the British. P-3 aircraft cannot operate in the South Atlantic without access closer than Ascension.

⁴ In an April 26 memorandum to Enders, Holmes, Pendleton, Service, Gompert, Funseth, and Robinson, McManaway outlined Department procedures for handling British and Argentine military and intelligence requests. The memorandum instructed the recipients to pass all requests to Burt. PM would then staff the request, obtain clearances and views from ARA, EUR, L, and any "other relevant offices," before preparing a memorandum for Eagleburger "stating the views of all parties, pros and cons, and a recommendation." (Department of State, Executive Secretariat, S/S Special Handling Restrictions Memos 1979-1983, Lot 96D262, ES Sensitive April 24-26 1982) Three days later, on April 29, Eagleburger sent a memorandum to Iklé, noting that the Department had established a single point of contact for coordinating requests and informing him to direct to Burt "until further notice" all inquiries on British requests "received in the context of the Falkland Islands issue," with the exception of "sensitive" intelligence. (Department of State, Executive Secretariat, S/S Special Handling Restrictions Memos 1979-1983, Lot 96D262, ES Sensitive April 27-30 1982)

⁵ Haig underlined the portion of this sentence beginning with "several weeks," and wrote "So what!" in the right-hand margin next to it.

Airlift support could assist the UK in moving supplies (from either the UK or the US) to Ascension with relative ease, but the long sea transit from Ascension to the Falklands would limit the impact of such support. Airlifting supplies beyond Ascension would be virtually impossible unless and until the UK were able to develop a C-141/C-5 capable field at South Georgia. Furthermore, air-dropped resupply would also be difficult, given the problems of terrain, weather, and air cover (not to mention the greater degree of U.S. involvement in hostilities).

The Argentine Dimension

U.S. exposure in Argentina is considerable. Economic and political stakes aside, there are some twelve to fifteen thousand American citizens in country. SOUTHCOM has a plan for their evacuation under permissive circumstances; any opposed exodus, however, is unrealistic. One possible purpose for sending the fleet towards the area would be to signal the GOA—to remind them of their responsibility to protect U.S. lives and to warn them of the consequences if they do not. The fleet would also be able to attack selected sites in Argentina in retaliation should U.S. citizens be harmed. In contrast to the naval option—which would require about 18 days to implement—B-52s operating from CONUS bases could be available much more quickly.

Soviet Options

Soviet capacity to affect the course of a Falklands contingency directly probably is less than our own. The Soviets could not introduce surface vessels or submarines into the area for some 3 weeks at best. They could, however, provide [*1 line not declassified*] reconnaissance support (using Bears out of Angola or Argentina). Bears or Backfires operating out of Argentina could also conceivably threaten UK or U.S. assets in the vicinity.

Another possibility would be Soviet assistance to the GOA, e.g., advisors, easily absorbed stores and supplies, and air defense equipment/systems with or without Soviet personnel. (An intelligence assessment detailing possible Soviet support of Argentina is attached at Tab A.)⁶

⁶ Attached but not printed are three undated briefing papers prepared in the DIA. An intelligence cable sent by the CIA to multiple recipients, April 29, also discussed the possibility of the Soviet Union providing military escort to vessels carrying grain from Argentina to the Soviet Union. ([*text not declassified*]; Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Security, Job 87T00623R: Policy Files (1973–1986), Box 2, Folder 9: SECOM Minutes of Agenda 1984)

Redeploying the Navy

The most important decisions concerning U.S. military assistance and support which you are likely to face in the coming days will be related to redeployment of USN assets. There is no way, however, to determine *a priori* when and how to use U.S. naval forces during the Falklands crisis.

Moving U.S. Navy combatants into the area could support all three of our objectives;

—providing political support (and some real military capability) on behalf of the British;

—putting the Soviets on notice;

—deterring Argentine reprisals against U.S. citizens and property by posing a serious threat of reprisals.⁷

At least 18 days would elapse between the decision to redeploy carriers to the area and the time by which they would be in range of potential targets. Given the unavoidable visibility associated with that movement of aircraft carriers, however, the political messages would be sent almost immediately. Of necessity, those signals would be seen by all three audiences—the British, the Soviets, and Argentines—but it is unlikely that we would want to use the naval instrument of policy at the same time for our three different purposes.

DOD believes that two carrier task groups would be required to achieve the capability for 24-hour, sustained operations in the area. Two CVBGs are currently operating off Puerto Rico as part of the Ocean Venture naval exercise. The upcoming winter weather in the South Atlantic will be severe and debilitating. Carrier operations would be particularly hazardous under such conditions when airfields to which aircraft might be diverted were unavailable.

Bearing in mind that the naval option could have a conflicting impact in London, Buenos Aires, and Moscow, a decision to redeploy the fleet should be carefully considered. Nevertheless, as this new phase of the crisis unfolds, it may be an option that we might want to execute in the next week or so.

⁷ Haig placed a checkmark at the end of each of the three points.