

199. Telegram From the Embassy in the United Kingdom to the Department of State¹

London, May 1, 1982, 1219Z

9696. Subject: The Falklands Dispute: Pressing the Diplomatic Option.

1. Secret—Entire text.

2. Summary: Having come down on their side, we should press HMG not to seek only a military solution, but also to focus on future diplomatic options. End summary.

3. HMG has little faith in a negotiated agreement. They doubt there is a coherent Argentine regime to reach agreement with and, in any event, see the Argentines as playing diplomacy exclusively for time. FCO sources were telling us last week that, aside from the Secretary's mediation efforts, no serious planning was underway on diplomatic options.

4. HMG now hopes that US pressure will bring an Argentine back-down. But more realistically, their goal will be to force surrender of the troops on the Falklands with a series of demoralizing but relatively low-risk military steps and worry about diplomatic solutions later. The strike on Stanley Airfield,² which has just been announced, fits such a strategy.

5. For political reasons, Thatcher needs to keep some diplomatic activity alive if she means to use military force. Otherwise, parliamentary unity will dissolve, and the public, which is still split on risking British lives, could turn against her. Hence, Pym is going to New

¹ Source: Reagan Library, Executive Secretariat, NSC Country File, Europe and Soviet Union, United Kingdom 04/01/1982–07/31/1982) (2). Secret; Immediate; Nodis. Printed from a copy that was received in the White House Situation Room.

² On the morning of May 1, two British Vulcan heavy bombers based at Ascension Island attacked the airfield at Port Stanley. This was followed by separate daybreak strikes by British Sea Harrier aircraft against other targets in the Falklands/Malvinas, including the airport at Goose Green. The same day, [text not declassified], reported on a briefing by a British Ministry of Defense official on the air raids. During the briefing, the British official informed [name not declassified] that preliminary reconnaissance indicated that "substantial" damage had been inflicted on the airfield at Port Stanley and that it would be "quite some time" before the runway damage would be repaired by the Argentines. (Telegram [telegram number, recipients, and date not declassified]. Reagan Library, Executive Secretariat, NSC Cable File, Falkland File 05/01/1982) An earlier assessment of the raids was sent by [text not declassified]. (Ibid.)

York—but with a limited brief. According to the FCO, Pym will simply explore the UNSYG's ideas and take stock.

6. U.S. approach. The weakness of other diplomatic options, and the risks inherent in an all-out search for a military solution threaten to keep us on the spot. If Thatcher can't budge the Argentine forces, she may turn to us for ever tougher measures. If she can, she may want to hold the Islands militarily without looking for a long-term solution. Either way, she will want to keep us in the grinder—protecting British interests in the South Atlantic.

7. Hence, we have an interest in encouraging the British to think hard now about diplomatic arrangements (a) to complement the present military steps and (b) to give the British alternatives should present pressures bog down—or prevail. We should not let the UK bureaucracy lock onto a solution that depends entirely on military pressure. Accordingly, we recommend that in his meeting with Pym,³ the Secretary:

—Put the British on notice that, even as we aid them to pressure Argentina for a settlement, we will expect the diplomatic track to be pursued diligently in the days ahead,

—Encourage hard thought about long term options, e.g. trusteeship, to avoid “unending hostility and insecurity in the South Atlantic.”

Louis

³ See Document 205.