

269. Message From the Embassy in Luxembourg to the White House¹

Luxembourg, May 17, 1982, 1330Z

32. Fm Jim Rentschler. To the White House, for Judge Clark, Immediate. Si [Situation] Room please pass copies to Dennis Blair and Roger Fontaine. SUBJECT: I pass along, quick and dirty, the following lights (high and low), dictated in decreasing order of priority:

Falklands. Despite some opening-ceremony pep talk earlier this morning by the Ministerial's Luxembourg hosts, the mood here is somber and dominated by the South Atlantic issue. Though NATO is the nominal headliner, most eyes are on the following EC meeting scheduled later today and the uncertain status of the sanctions renewal. Leaving Ireland aside, the key to continued support for the UK may hinge on Italy. During last night's bilateral,² Colombo told the Secretary he simply could not join a pro-sanctions consensus without bringing down the Spadolini government. Al told him that a break in EC ranks now would have the certain effect of emboldening extremist elements in Argentina (Peronistas and Navy), hardening their intransigence, and drastically increasing the likelihood of military escalation. A sobered Colombo called me shortly after the meeting and asked me to convey

¹ Source: Reagan Library, Executive Secretariat, NSC Cable File, Falkland File 05/17/1982. Secret; Sensitive, Immediate. Sent via privacy channels.

² See Document 268.

an urgent message to Haig which he wished to keep secret from his own people, namely, that a change in his EC instructions might be possible if Max Rabb were to weigh in immediately with Spadolini and the secretaries of the coalition parties and make the same points which Haig had made to Colombo himself (this resulted in the Rome demarche you may have seen last evening—it's a long shot, but it could help).³ A few other Falkland-related items of direct concern to us:

—Al's talks with Pym last night were one on one,⁴ but the Secretary said he was going to phone you and provide you with a complete fill-in. No one in our del here has the complete story except the Secretary himself, but two nuggets did filter down: 1) the Brits are reportedly incensed at what they see as less than wholehearted U.S. support for their position; and 2) the negotiating process still has some time, but not much (one hears a great deal of talk around the other delegations and in the press about May 19 being South Atlantic D-Day).

—An old friend of mine in Pym's party told me he had seen a transcript of the President's last phone call to Mrs. Thatcher,⁵ which he termed "terrifying"; since this characterization is greatly at variance with both the tone and contents as reported to me (via Haig) from Washington late last week, is it possible for me to see the text on a close-hold basis? Or are British sensitivities simply verging on the neurotic?

—Thanks to some indiscreet glomming of Stadis traffic, I have learned that Tom Enders and his ARA people are pushing Haig to adopt a kind of contact group approach to the crisis emphasizing much heavier pressure on the UK than on Argentina.⁶ I think this is a calamitous idea, guaranteed to give us the very worst of both worlds. God knows, the wicket we have with the Brits right now is sticky enough, but if this hare-brained lucubration were ever leaked (let alone acted upon), we could kiss a successful Presidential visit to London next month goodby. And that's just for starters.

[Omitted here is discussion of issues unrelated to the conflict in the South Atlantic.]

Warm regards, Jim

³ See footnote 3, Document 268.

⁴ No memorandum of conversation of Haig's May 16 meeting with Pym in Luxembourg has been found. Telegram Secto 7063, May 17, transmitted to the Department and USICA a transcript of the public statement made by the two men to the press following their meeting. (Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, D820257-1013)

⁵ See Document 257.

⁶ See Document 267.