

271. Telegram From Secretary of State Haig to the Department of State¹

Luxembourg, May 17, 1982, 2154Z

Secto 7068. Eyes only for Bremer from the Secretary. Subject: Message for the President.

1. Please have the following message hand delivered eyes only to the President.

2. British Foreign Secretary Pym has just shown me the UK negotiating position approved today by Mrs. Thatcher's War Cabinet. It is to be delivered to the UN Secretary General tonight as a final UK position which the Argentines have forty-eight hours to accept or not.²

3. The British have made a serious effort. But the position is less forthcoming than the proposal we put to the two sides at the end of April. In that the Argentines rejected that earlier US proposal, the British must realize that their current position is unlikely to be accepted. My own assessment is that the Argentines will not accept this, unless there has been a substantial change in the political mood within the Junta as a result of recent hostilities and the imminence of a British landing on the Islands. I find it hard to believe that such a change has occurred.

4. The forty-eight hour deadline may well coincide with a British landing on the Falklands. The British probably think that they can mop up a demoralized Argentine garrison if they can execute a successful landing though they must be acutely worried about the Argentine subs and mainland-based air power. Pym did assure me that London is not now contemplating strikes against the mainland.

5. There is of course the possibility that the Argentines will respond with relatively modest changes to the British text, which could give Mrs. Thatcher pause before ordering a landing. While London has anticipated this possibility by stressing that this is the final UK position, they may behave differently if the Argentines come a long way. However, I doubt that the Argentines will come far enough to avert a British assault. Odds are that the battle for the Falklands will begin as early as this Wednesday or Thursday.³

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Haig Papers, Department of State, Day File, May 17, 1982. Secret; Alpha; Flash; Nodis. Drafted by Gompert; approved by McManaway. Haig initialed the first page of the telegram.

² A British copy of their May 17 position is published on the Thatcher Foundation website.

³ May 19 or 20.

6. We have begun our own contingency planning. We will want to consider a new initiative—though not necessarily a US initiative—in the event that the Secretary General ends his own effort when the forty-eight hours expires. In the meantime, any hint that we might make a move once the UN effort collapses would create a crisis between us and the British, by dooming their own proposal and by compounding the political problems Mrs. Thatcher will face if the British go ahead with their landing. Indeed, we will have to think through carefully whether we should move at all should the Secretary General give up his effort.

7. The British are as resolute as ever. Mrs. Thatcher is acting on the basis of military confidence, domestic political support, and most of all an unshakeable commitment to the principle at stake. They are counting on us—and perhaps only us—for support.

Haig