

**268. Telegram From Secretary of State Haig to the Department of State<sup>1</sup>**

May 18, 1982, 1530Z

Secto 7104. Subject: Secretary's Bilateral With Italian FonMin Colombo, May 16.

1. (S-Entire text).

2. Summary: The Secretary's May 16 bilateral with Italian Foreign Minister Colombo focused primarily on the Middle East and the Falklands. On the former, the Secretary laid out U.S. views concerning three interrelated aspects of the Middle East situation, including the Iran/Iraq conflict, Lebanon, and the autonomy talks. Concerning the South Atlantic crisis, the Secretary underscored the necessity of solid EC support for the UK at a particularly critical juncture (which resulted in an urgent follow-up demarche in Rome, personally recommended by Colombo). In addition, the two Ministers briefly discussed START, NAC consultations, and credit restrictions. End summary.

3. The Secretary met for an hour on the margins of the Luxembourg Ministerial May 16 with Italian Foreign Minister Emilio Colombo. Accompanying the Secretary on the U.S. side were U.S. NATO PermRep W. Tapley Bennett and NSC Senior Staff Member James R Rentschler. Joining Colombo on the Italian side were Foreign Ministry Political Director Bottai and Italian NATO PermRep Tornetta, plus an interpreter. The following subjects were discussed.

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

6. Falklands. The Secretary stressed that the situation in the South Atlantic had reached a very critical point where it was essential for Britain's allies to support her. The situation was increasingly dangerous, not because Britain had failed to make concessions but because of Argentine intransigence. The Argentines had softened their rigidity on only one point, the question of sovereignty, but they had then compensated for that by insisting on de facto arrangements on the Islands during the interim period of administration which would ensure the same outcome.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Reagan Library, Executive Secretariat, NSC Cable File, Falkland File 05/18/1982. Secret; Sensitive; Immediate; Nodis. Sent from the Secretary's aircraft. Haig was then en route from Luxembourg to Washington. Printed from a copy that was received in the White House Situation Room.

7. Colombo responded that he had received the Secretary's letter on this subject<sup>2</sup> and had carefully read and understood it. He said that he recognized the importance of what the Secretary was saying but that in present circumstances he was not permitted to join an EC consensus favoring renewal of economic sanctions. This fact was very disagreeable for him, but if he said yes, there would be a major political crisis in Italy. It is the military escalation in the South Atlantic which has caused great problems in his country from psychological point of view; the reactions of the Argentine population to the sinking of the *Belgrano* had had a major impact on Italian public opinion, given the fact that millions of Argentines were of Italian origin and that many of these even held dual citizenship. Colombo added that the issues were very clear in his mind and that the points which the Secretary had made about the need to support the UK were correct but that unfortunately irrational situations sometimes prevailed in [garble—one's] country, and the present situation was one of them.

8. The Secretary noted that he was sensitive to Italian concerns and understood them; the U.S. itself has great difficulties with the present situation albeit for different reasons. The great tragedy, however, is the fact that such a position will only lead to more bloodshed, with the loss of many young men on both sides. Our major concern at the moment is that a breaking of EC ranks with the UK will gravely diminish the influence of more moderate forces in Argentine society which are beginning to favor a negotiated solution; at the same time, it will strengthen the extremist elements—the Peronistas and the Navy—who will be emboldened by the perception of Allied disunity and become even more intransigent, thereby increasing the likelihood of military escalation. We hope the Secretary General will succeed in his efforts in New York, and we are prepared to do everything we can to help; but unless these efforts achieve some agreement this week, the chances for avoiding more violence look bleak.

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

12. Falklands footnote. Shortly following the bilateral, Colombo phoned Rentschler and asked him to convey an urgent recommendation to the Secretary which he did not want his own people to know. In the interests of generating changed instructions for Colombo to use during EC deliberations on sanctions renewal, it would, he asserted, be useful for the Secretary to instruct Ambassador Rabb to seek an urgent appointment with Prime Minister Spadolini and the secretaries of the coalition parties and make the same points to them concerning

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<sup>2</sup> See Document 238.

the South Atlantic crisis which the Secretary had made to Colombo himself, placing particular emphasis on the effect which the perception of Allied disunity would have on extremist forces in Argentina (on the basis of this message the Secretary approved Secto 7058).<sup>3</sup>

**Haig**

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<sup>3</sup> Sent to Rome, May 15. (Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, N820005-0001) In telegram 11692 from Rome, May 17, Rabb reported on his meeting that morning with Andreotti at which the former Prime Minister stated he "would attempt to maintain Christian Democratic support for sanction renewal, and elicit Socialist leader Craxi's acquiescence." (Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, N820005-0002)