

276. Paper Prepared by the National Security Council Staff¹

Washington, undated

THE SOUTH ATLANTIC CRISIS: IMMINENT EVENTS AND U.S. CONTINGENCIES

In the event that the British attack the Falklands in force within the very near term, and accepting as given 1) a militarily indecisive performance, with the possibility of drawn-out conflict;² 2) disruption of Pérez de Cuéllar's UN track; 3) no British move against the Argentine mainland; and, most important, 4) the fact that our major objective will best be served by the earliest possible British success, coupled with the least possible damage to Hemispheric interests, the following judgments assume critical relevance:

Military Factors

—We cannot diminish or interrupt—indeed, we should redouble—our current efforts in support of the Brits involving logistics, intelligence, and communications activity.

—We should continue to avoid any direct combat participation and ensure that this fact is publicized.

UN Track

—Pérez de Cuéllar's effort will collapse by the force of events, and become pretty much of a dead-letter (though for public consumption we should continue our line that we hope the SYG will remain involved and that we stand ready to help—see Public Affairs/Psychological Factors below).

¹ Source: Reagan Library, Latin American Affairs Directorate Files, NSC, Falkland/Malvinas: NSC & State Memos, 1982. Secret. Rentschler, Blair, and Fontaine sent the paper to McFarlane under a May 19 covering memorandum that reads: "Attached as you requested are our collective judgments concerning the issues you have raised vis-à-vis the South Atlantic crisis, cast in the form of a contingency paper." A stamped notation at the top of the covering memorandum indicates that Clark saw it. McFarlane requested the paper in a May 19 note to Rentschler and Fontaine. (Reagan Library, Dennis C. Blair Files, Country File, United Kingdom 1982 (05/01/1982-07/31/1982))

² In a May 19 memorandum to Howe, which discussed the possible outcomes of a British assault on the Falklands/Malvinas, Tom Miller (PM/P) wrote: "The crux of the subject is, *we cannot predict a British victory in an assault on the Falklands*, and the consequences of their attempt with accompanying failure would be dire; given the geography, and British assets, they will get one chance, and if that fails, then would come managing extrication, salvaging what can be salvaged, and some hard decisions by all concerned." (Department of State, Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs, Falklands Crisis Historical Files, Lot 86D157, unlabelled folder)

—Should, as is likely, the issue be remanded to the Security Council, we should work closely with the UK and follow their lead (including a veto, if any adverse resolution is pushed), maintaining *UNSC 502 as our bottom-line*;

—With or without activity in the Security Council, movement toward the UNGA is likely, where Argentina can probably count on considerable G-77 support; in this case, we should work for a Western consensus but not be overly concerned at a negative vote (Pérez de Cuéllar himself has dismissed the meaningfulness of any activity in that forum).

Diplomatic Factors

—We should recognize that, in all probability, only the U.S. has the will and the capacity to promote a settlement *once the Brits have secured themselves on the islands*. The question of *timing* will be all important in that effort (attempts to resuscitate a direct U.S. mediatory role will prove counter-productive *before* and *immediately after* sizeable landings; chances for success will then improve if and when the Brits have demonstrated a creditable capacity to lodge themselves in strength).

—Much of our critical diplomacy, at least so far as the Brits are concerned, will probably have to be conducted at the Presidential level (via phone and letter); Dick Walters or Jeane Kirkpatrick (or both) may be the best interlocutors vis-à-vis Galtieri (Judge Clark himself or you should also be considered in that capacity).

U.S.-U.K. Bilateral Factors

—Assuming the Brits land and lodge themselves in strength, it will be essential to convey a number of clear signals to them at the highest level:

—We have fully supported you; we will continue to do so *over the near-term*;

—We are partners in the enterprise you have undertaken in support of a basic principle—even to the extent of jeopardizing our own significant strategic interests and the safety of our citizens—and this basic fact gives us the right to provide friendly counsel on (and help influence) the course of events;

—We simply do not believe that you have the capability to sustain an indefinite sway over the Falklands, either militarily or politically, and you should know that we are *not* prepared to support you in any such project;

—There must be, in other words—and in the not too distant future once the dust from the initial military operations settles—a *negotiated* solution.

—An explicit U.S.-U.K. understanding is therefore required concerning your middle- and long-term intentions, recognizing that the

U.S. continues to support compliance with UNSC 502 and will simply *not* provide either blank-check (money) or open-ended (time) assistance on behalf of UK operations in the South Atlantic.

—Likely requests for escalating military assistance should be on a case-by-case basis and explicitly linked to the quality of the U.K. commitment to a post-invasion negotiated solution.

Public Affairs/Psychological Factors

—Congressional briefings—a sound idea—should stress our adherence to UNSC 502, the major efforts we and others went to in order to turn around Argentine intransigence (which recently has begun to soften, at least slightly), the good-faith attempts Britain made to bridge the gap, and the fact that while this has been an agonizing and very difficult area of decision for us, we have determined that our strategic interests in the traditional North Atlantic/East-West context outweigh considerations in the Hemisphere (though we will actively pursue damage-control activity in that area). In addition, we should emphasize—probably in executive session—that our support for the UK is *not* open-ended and is tied to the commitments we will elicit from Great Britain for credible post-hostilities exertions directed toward a negotiated solution.

—We should harp on UNSC 502 as often and as insistently as we can as the only viable basis for a settlement, emphasizing the prior use of force to which Argentina resorted;

—We should reiterate support for the relevance of the Secretary-General's role and our readiness to help in any way the parties might consider helpful;

—We should consult regularly with our Allies and impress upon them the line Haig used in Luxembourg,³ the necessity for a perception of solid Western backing for the UK.

—In background briefings and public Presidential statements we should continue to push for the earliest possible negotiated solution (again citing UNSC 502 as the base-line point of departure).

Summary Conclusions

—*There is little or nothing we can do in a pre-invasion period apart from what we are already now doing;*

³ At a May 16 press conference in Luxembourg after his meeting with Pym (see footnote 4, Document 269), Haig said that "the U.S. stands ready at any moment to make any contribution that it can make to bring about a political solution in accordance with the United Nations resolution." (Steven Rattner, "Common Market Delays Vote To Retain Argentine Boycott," *New York Times*, May 17, p. A1)

—Our maximum leverage with the Brits (and possibly also with the Argentines, though this is less sure) will come *after UK troops have landed in strength*, and we should not hesitate to push that leverage as forcefully as possible;

—The U.S. will have to take the direct lead in any post-landing diplomatic effort.

—We should be ready for a worst-case outcome—ignominious Iran rescue-raid type failure—and help the Brits in any Dunkirk-like withdrawal (and not hesitate to push for that if things turn really catastrophic).