

299. Memorandum From James M. Rentschler and Dennis C. Blair of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Clark)¹

Washington, May 26, 1982

SUBJECT

Proposed Presidential Mediation in the South Atlantic

Issue

Should the President call for a summit peace conference for the Falklands, inviting Mrs. Thatcher and General Galtieri to Washington or some neutral location to solve the dispute?

Pros

—If ground were properly prepared, could bring an end to hostilities (depends on readiness of two sides to compromise—right now, little likelihood of success);

—Could, if properly timed, return the U.S. relationship with Argentina some distance toward what it was before the breakdown of the Haig mission;

—Could have a similarly restorative and/or reparative effect vis-a-vis our relations in the rest of the Hemisphere, improving our chances for resuming cooperative initiatives there;

—Would, if successful, enhance President's image as man of peace. Even if unsuccessful, could possibly enhance the image, as long as properly handled and did not end in U.S. and one country ganging up on the third.

Cons:

—If there were not a readiness to compromise on the two sides, the President's attempt would go the way of the Haig mission, the Perez de Cuellar mission, the Peruvian president's mission: just one more unsuccessful peace attempt with the difference that the President's personal prestige would be tainted with the stigma of failure;

¹ Source: Reagan Library, Latin American Affairs Directorate Files, Falklands/Malvinas: NSC & State Memos, 1982. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for information. Sent through McFarlane. A stamped notation indicates that Clark saw the memorandum. On another copy of the memorandum, Poindexter wrote in the upper right hand corner: "5/26 Judge read and agrees. JP." (Ibid.) According to a May 26 NSC routing slip, McFarlane sent the memorandum to Poindexter for delivery to Clark, who was in Santa Barbara, California. Poindexter wrote on the routing slip: "Have Jim Rentschler go see Jesse Helms on the Hill tomorrow and explain. JP." (Ibid.)

—If the attempt were made before a British military victory, it would do great damage to relations with the U.K., amounting to another Suez (depriving U.K. of the fruits of success at the critical moment);

—If the President's proposal, once the conference has convened, failed to meet the minimum conditions of either the U.K. or Argentina, that country could pull out of the conference with increased bitterness and resentment towards the United States.

—The President himself is not the sort of "detail" man who is best suited to negotiating personally a complicated peace settlement, as Carter did at Camp David.

Conclusion

A Presidential call for a summit peace conference is a good idea *if* we have reason to believe that the U.K. and Argentina are ready to compromise their differences and *if* we have prior assurance that both parties want the President in between. A call for a summit peace conference before British success on the ground, and before the two sides show signs of a readiness to compromise, would pose too many risks to be worthwhile.

Roger Fontaine concurs.