

339. Telegram From the Embassy in Argentina to the Department of State¹

Buenos Aires, June 14, 1982, 1430Z

3543. CINCSO for INTAFF, CINCLANT for POLAD, Rome for Vatican. Subject: South Atlantic Crisis: Sitrep as of 1100 Local June 14.

1. Summary (U): The battle for Port Stanley rages on, but we sense that Argentines now recognize it is probably just a question of time before they are defeated, although they say it will be a Pyrrhic victory for the UK. Neutral zone for civilians established. Pope's visit still reverberating.² Galtieri probably benefited and John Paul's message of peace apparently fell mostly on deaf ears.

The War

1. Today's dailies reflect a mixture of concern about the British offensive and pride at Argentine resistance. According to the GOA, the British during the last three days advanced 3.5 kilometers (UK claims 8) and the front has stabilized after fierce fighting. Artillery duels continue. The British have evidently opted for consolidating their position after each small advance. The British reportedly secured a new beachhead at "Enriqueta", 5 kilometers south of Stanley. Meanwhile, the GOA alleges intense bombardment of English positions by the Argentine Air Force. Everyone is waiting for the next British assault. The general expectation is that the UK will eventually prevail. Many senior GOA officials have publicly conceded the possibility of losing Stanley, but they want it to cost the British dearly.

Protection of Civilians

2. The Argentine Government agreed to establish a neutral zone of two square blocks in Port Stanley at the water's edge, to protect civilians and wounded. This was a result of ICRC representation that commenced June 11.

Pope's Visit

4. (U) The visit of John Paul II continues to reverberate. It was considered a major success by most commentators. Apart from unprecedented crowds (estimated by police at over 4 million in the two days) most events were carried out without significant problems, a credit to the organizers, particularly church authorities and Interior Subsecretary Col. Bernardo Menendez.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, D820309-0989. Confidential; Immediate. Sent for information Immediate to South Atlantic Sitrep Collective and for information to USCINCSO, USCINCLANT, and the Defense Intelligence Agency.

² See footnote 2, Document 332.

5. (U) The Pope's frequent statements urging a peaceful solution to the South Atlantic conflict were more direct than many predicted and were echoed by some in the crowd who chanted "we want peace." The regular columnist on religion for Clarin, Jose Ignacio Lopez, noted that the Pope did not mince his words. Quoting extensively from the Pope's homilies and public statements, Lopez points out that the Pope brushed aside all rationalizations for violence or war and called for peace without qualifications.

6. (C) But this was ignored by most of the press, which devoted scores of pages to John Paul II's comings and goings but none to reflection on what he said. Similarly, many spectators, particularly the young, treated the affair as a "happening". On the other hand, His Holiness' message was crystal clear, we have no doubt that the Junta understood it.

7. (C) Galtieri was the consummate politician. He received John Paul II on arrival, met with him twice, received communion and was seen by millions of TV viewers receiving the Pope's blessing on departure. There is little doubt that the visit paid political dividends to the President.

The Roller Coaster Mood

8. (C) The visit of John Paul II was undoubtedly the most popular and gratifying event for this country since winning the world soccer cup in 1978. But only two days later, the Argentines were blue again. Their highly-touted football team lost to longtime cellar-dweller Belgium in the World Cup. And now it is evident to all that they are losing what many Argentines see as the biggest prize of them all, in the Falklands.

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