

351. Memorandum From the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Eagleburger) to the Executive Secretary of the Department of State (Bremer), the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Enders), the Assistant Secretary of State-Designate for European Affairs (Burt), and the Director of the Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs (Howe)¹

Washington, June 17, 1982

SUBJECT

Falklands Prisoners

Nicko Henderson has passed on the following information:

The British have 8–9000 prisoners in hand. They are rounding up others, all of whom have stopped fighting, on West Falklands. The total will be well below the 15,000 that the Argentine commander reported. The main problem is not starvation but exposure. They will load as many as 7000 on the Canberra and another ship in order to provide immediate relief from the elements.

The Argentines have replied through the Swiss that they are prepared to accept repatriation and want it done through Uruguay “without precondition”. HMG will have to decide now what to do. One option is to send the 7000 back through Uruguay; the preference

¹ Source: Department of State, Executive Secretariat, S/S Special Handling Restrictions Memos 1979–1983, Lot 96D262, ES Sensitive June 16–30 1982. Secret; Sensitive. In Tosec 90018/168048, June 18, Eagleburger transmitted the text of the memorandum to Haig, who was in New York for the UN Special Session on Disarmament. (Reagan Library, Executive Secretariat, NSC Cable File, Box 35, Falkland File 06/18/1982)

remains to send them into Argentine ports, but that is excluded by the Argentine non-response on cessation of hostilities, unless HMG relaxes its condition.

Even if a way is found to return the 7000, and possibly more, the UK will keep 10% (officers, including Menendez); it is not clear where they will be kept or under what conditions they would be returned.²

Henderson thought that any US assistance that might be requested would be in connection with those prisoners (i.e., the 90%) that HMG is trying to repatriate as soon as possible.

² In telegram 16716 to Buenos Aires, June 17, the Department reported that the British Embassy had requested U.S. assistance in obtaining Argentine agreement to permit repatriation of captured Argentine troops through the Argentine port of Comodoro Rivadavia or the Chilean port of Punta Arenas. (Reagan Library, Executive Secretariat, NSC Cable File, Falkland File 06/17/1982 (2)) Later, the Argentine Foreign Ministry announced that repatriation of prisoners would be undertaken through Montevideo beginning June 18. (NMCC Significant Event Report, June 18; Washington National Records Center, OSD Files, FRC 330-84-0003, Argentina (June-Sept) 1982) On June 18, however, the Argentine and British Ambassadors in Montevideo informed the Uruguayan Government that repatriation would be through Argentine ports. (Telegram 2349 from Montevideo, June 21; Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, D820325-0485)