

372. Memorandum From Roger W. Fontaine of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Clark)¹

Washington, July 6, 1982

SUBJECT

Memorandum of Conversation with Argentine Ambassador, Esteban A. Takacs and Brigadier General Miguel A. Mallea Gil, Military Attache

Over lunch with Ambassador Takacs and General Mallea Gil on July 1 these points were made:

According to both the attache and the ambassador, General Bignone was a moderate and he had chosen a relatively strong cabinet under the circumstances. AGUIRRE Lanari, the foreign minister, is inexperienced but is conservative. He has spent little or no time in the United States. The new finance minister, DAGNINO Pastore, served under President Ongania after Krieger Vasena, and he is a moderate. His views do not differ much from Alemann, but he is easier to deal with than his predecessor. The Ambassador believes Dagnino will give the

¹ Source: Reagan Library, Roger W. Fontaine Files, Argentina (June 1982–July 1982). Confidential. Sent for information. A stamped notation in the top right-hand corner of the memorandum indicates that Clark saw it. The meeting took place at the Ambassador's residence.

industrial sector “a little oxygen” to revive business and restore private sector confidence.

General Mallea worried aloud about the President’s statement on the Argentines during his press conference,² wondering why the President “was so hard on us.” Both felt we needed a public gesture like lifting the sanctions which would strengthen Bignone. Even at that, it would be four to six months before any U.S. delegation should be sent to Buenos Aires. In the meantime, General Mallea suggested the new Secretary of State could meet with all the Latin American ambassadors as a sign of his interest.

Later, alone with Takacs, the ambassador admitted that Malvinas was a disaster brought on by the Argentines themselves. He felt the civilians were at the greatest fault—Costa Mendez in particular—because they did not have the courage to warn the military of the consequences of such an action. He added he would be returning to Buenos Aires “to smell out the new government.” He was not sure he would be asked to stay in Washington.

² Presumably a reference to a remark made by Reagan in his June 30 press conference. In response to a question about the direction of U.S. foreign policy, Reagan stated: “Secretary Haig did a superhuman job in trying to prevent bloodshed in the South Atlantic situation regarding the Falklands. We were unable to succeed in that to persuade the aggressive party to leave the islands and then have a peaceful solution to the problem.” (*Public Papers: Reagan, 1982, Book I, p 829*)