

**439. Message From British Prime Minister Thatcher to
President Reagan¹**

London, December 6, 1983

Begins

Dear Ron,

Thank you for giving me advance warning of your decision on certification and Argentina.² As you say, this is a delicate question for us. My immediate concern, now that your decision is taken, is that our public line on both sides of the Atlantic should be such as to minimise the difficulties which will inevitably arise.

I shall undoubtedly come under public and Parliamentary pressure. I shall have to say that I would regret any sales of arms to Argentina which are likely to increase the threat to the Falkland Islanders and to our people who are down there to defend them. I would also propose to say the following, without revealing that I am drawing on points in your message:

¹ Source: Reagan Library, European and Soviet Affairs Directorate, NSC, United Kingdom–1983 12/05/1983–12/10/1983. Secret. The Department transmitted the text of the message in telegram Tosec 150041/346473 to Shultz in West Germany, December 7. (Ibid.)

² Reagan's December 2 letter to Thatcher is printed as Tab B, Document 437.

(i) US law provides a test of human rights performance for certification: it is the judgement of the American Administration that the Argentine human rights performance now meets this test;

(ii) certification permits but does not require sales of arms;

(iii) we know that the US Government will look very carefully at any requests for arms in the light of all the relevant circumstances, including the overriding need to maintain peace in the region; and

(iv) we have been very pleased to note Cap Weinberger's public assurance to this effect.

I hope that this will be helpful in dealing with the likely public reaction to certification. The public reaction to any subsequent sale of arms will be much more difficult, and I remain very concerned also about the substance of the matter.

I am afraid that the Argentine Military will see certification as the thin end of the wedge and that Alfonsin will come under great pressure from them to ask you to sell more than you would think right. Geoffrey Howe and Michael Heseltine will be seeing George Shultz and Cap Weinberger at the various NATO meetings in Brussels this week and will pursue with them our consultations on how best to proceed.

As far as relations with the new Argentine Government are concerned, I note that George Bush will be representing the United States at Dr Alfonsin's inauguration. As you know, I welcome the restoration of democracy in Argentina. I have made it clear that I cannot discuss sovereignty over the Falklands. But our disagreement on this issue should not prevent Britain and Argentina from re-establishing normal commercial and diplomatic relations. If he has the opportunity to do so, I hope that George Bush will tell Alfonsin that we shall be very ready to work with his government to that end.

Best wishes.

Yours ever,

Margaret³

Ends

³ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.