

73. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Argentina¹

Washington, April 7, 1982, 0520Z

92492. Subject: Secretary's April 6 Meeting With Argentine Foreign Minister Costa Mendez (Falklands Dispute).

1. S-Entire text.

2. Summary: At one hour meeting April 6² the Secretary set forth to Argentine Foreign Minister Costa Mendez the seriousness of the current situation, our preliminary ideas on how it might be resolved in a peaceful manner, and the need for urgent action. Costa Mendez said he would call his President tonight and be back in touch as soon

¹ Source: Reagan Library, Executive Secretariat, NSC Country File, Latin America/Central, Argentina (04/06/1982-04/10/1982). Secret; Immediate; Nodis. Sent for information Immediate to London and the White House. Printed from a copy that was received in the White House Situation Room.

² No memorandum of conversation of this meeting has been found.

as possible.³ Depending on the Argentine response, the Secretary would consider flying tomorrow to London and from there to Buenos Aires.

3. The Secretary began the conversation by delineating the collision course that the Argentine and the UK are now on. Further conflict would be disastrous for both countries: In the case of the Argentines it could well mean the destruction of much of its fleet. The further the British fleet moves toward the South Atlantic, the harder it will be to find a peaceful solution. The US is prepared to do everything possible to find a formula that would permit both countries to save face. It is in all our interests that we succeed.

4. Costa Mendez welcomed our offer of help but noted that this crisis has come about because there was almost no attention given previously to the depth of Argentine feeling on the matter. He repeated the standard GOA line on guarantees for the Islanders.

5. The Secretary said he wanted to get more specific. There are two critical conditions that must be addressed if conflict is to be avoided: The British fleet must stop moving south; the only way that will happen in our view is if the GOA agrees to an alternative administrative arrangement on the Falkland Islands (i.e., withdrawal of its military forces). The Secretary said that a way must be found to delay final resolution of the sovereignty issue. There is no possibility that the British Government would recognize Argentine sovereignty at this time.

6. Costa Mendez made clear that it would be very difficult for the GOA to back down from its recent success in establishing de facto sovereignty and control. He went back over the history of negotiations with the UK, claiming that the British have on several occasions been on the verge of acceding to the Argentine claim. It is, in Costa Mendez's view, a much more important issue to the Argentine people than to the British. He mused about the incredible situation that has now arisen. Nevertheless, he agreed that he would do everything possible to find and convince his government of the need for a formula that finesses the sovereignty issue at the present time.

³ In telegram 93478 to Buenos Aires, April 8, the Department confirmed that Costa Mendez telephoned Haig on the night of April 6 to inform him that Argentina accepted the U.S. offer of assistance and that he would be welcome to come to Buenos Aires following his visit to London. (Reagan Library, Executive Secretariat, NSC Cable File, Falkland File 04/08/1982 (1)) On April 7, Costa Mendez dispatched to Haig a dossier of briefing documents with an accompanying covering letter stating his belief that they "may assist you in your task." (Department of State, Executive Secretariat, S/S Special Handling Restrictions Memos 1979-1983, Lot 96D262, ES Sensitive April 1-9 1982) The same day, Henderson also sent to Haig "background material" for him to read during his flight to London. (Ibid.)

7. The Secretary then summarized the possible elements of a solution: Agree to remove Argentine forces and halt the fleet; set up an impartial, third party, administration for the Islanders; and, finally, resolve the sovereignty issue through a negotiating process. Regarding the impartial administrative role, the Secretary suggested that it might be best to have other countries involved, perhaps the Canadians, ourselves, and two Latin American countries. Costa Mendez did suggest as his own personal idea (he emphasized he had not discussed it with Galtieri) that it might be more practical to think in terms of a joint Anglo-Argentine administrative structure, perhaps with a third party to help resolve any problems that might arise.

8. In summarizing, the Secretary said he needed to know from the GOA if we can keep the sovereignty issue out for now, yet find a formula that will represent a sufficiently great change from the previous status so that the GOA can explain the partial backdown to its own people. The Secretary suggested that if the GOA can agree to defer the sovereignty issue in this fashion, he would be willing to go to London immediately and, depending on the response from Prime Minister Thatcher, from there to Buenos Aires. Costa Mendez said he would talk to President Galtieri tonight and get back as soon as possible.

9. Others present at the meeting were Argentine Ambassadors S Takacs and Figueroa, Assistant Secretary Enders, and ARA/SC Service.

10. This message for your info only.

Haig