

90. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Buenos Aires, April 10, 1982

PARTICIPANTS

Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig, Jr.
President Galtieri, Argentina
Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Enders
Foreign Minister Costa Mendez, Argentina
Under Secretary Enrique Ros, Argentina
Brig Gen Iglesias, Secretary General of Presidency, Argen.
Maj General Mertil, Chief of Planning, Argentina
Ambassador Vernon A. Walters

President Galtieri welcomed Secretary Haig by saying that he would call the Secretary "General" because there is a brotherhood between military men and a commonality of ethical values that made blunt talk easier between them. He would talk first of all about yesterday, and then about tomorrow.

Since 1833 when the British took the Malvinas Islands by force, the Argentines have never ceased to claim sovereignty and to demand their return. The United Nations in 1965 recommended negotiations between the two powers in order to accomplish the transfer of sovereignty to Argentina. The United Kingdom accepted under the framework of decolonization. The Argentines tried for the next 17 years, by every possible means, to convince the British government to arrive at a solution. The British have never conducted any substantial discussions concerning the transfer of sovereignty of the territorial integration of the Malvinas into Argentina. No one can accuse the Argentines of a lack of patience or prudence throughout this period. Unlike the United Kingdom, the Argentines have not used diplomatic legerdemain and evasion. The Argentine claims are and have always been clear. We are patient, but patience, like water, can run out. We now face a crisis initiated perhaps by Argentina but aggravated by the over-reaction of the United Kingdom government. The British reaction to the Argentine occupation of the Malvinas is out of all proportion to the Argentine action. The Argentine government is willing to find an honorable solution that will save Mrs. Thatcher's government. Argentina does not desire to undermine the prestige of the United Kingdom. But we cannot sacrifice our honor either. The Argentine people and nation owe a great

¹ Source: Department of State, Executive Secretariat, Files of Alexander M. Haig, Jr., 1981-1982, Lot 82D370, (2) Falklands Crisis—1982. Secret; Sensitive. The meeting took place at the Casa Rosada. For Haig's later account of this meeting, see Haig, *Caveat*, pp. 276-279.

deal to the United Kingdom. The British community in Argentina is prosperous and well integrated into Argentine life. British families are always welcome in Argentina. The only grave difference we have had with the British is the matter that is under discussion today. No member of the Argentine government has spoken offensive or insulting words towards Mrs. Thatcher or the Cabinet Ministers of Great Britain—General Galtieri repeated twice for emphasis—“until today.”

Galtieri continued that before you (Secretary Haig) and your friends came to power in the United States, the Argentine government struggled against subversion. We continue the struggle. In El Salvador, Argentina worked to save the political situation. Argentina is loved in Central America. On the Malvinas matter, Peru and Bolivia support us, along with others. We and the United States ride the same train, but we will not ride in the caboose. I will talk to you about something quite frankly that the Argentine government does not like, and that is the furnishing of intelligence to Great Britain and the use of Ascension Islands for supply for the British. That is what I have to say about events up to yesterday. But today I do want to thank you for your presence here and the interest the United States has shown in helping us to find a solution to this problem. Today, the Argentine government is perfectly disposed to finding a decorous, acceptable way out for Great Britain. But you will understand that the Argentine government must look good too. We have an internal situation that you will have already felt. The United States has in Argentina today a government as friendly to you as any ever to govern here. We understand that we need Margaret Thatcher and her Conservative government in Great Britain; but not at the expense of Argentine national interests. The measures taken by Mrs. Thatcher are creating a delicate domestic situation for us. Her statements lack balance. We want to help her to achieve a balanced position. Remember that Peron did not win his election in 1946, the United States lost Argentina. The Argentine people tend to react instinctively and emotionally. I must lead them to a solution which will not recreate an Argentina of the 1940s. Our crisis today can easily result in the destabilization of South America and thereby weaken the defense of the West. I cannot fail to express to you that directly or indirectly I have received offers of aircraft, pilots, and armaments from countries “not part of the West.” When Margaret Thatcher declared a zone of exclusion, in reality a zone of war, she created an environment wherein if Monday an Argentine ship were torpedoed, the Argentine people would believe and hold the United Kingdom responsible, even if the Soviets or some other nation did it. Conversely, if a United Kingdom ship were sunk the British would certainly blame the Argentines. Our present equilibrium is difficult to maintain and a conflict could spread to other parts of the world. The consequences

can go far beyond a local problem between the United Kingdom and Argentina. The result is uncertain. The Argentine people took the decision on the second of April to recover our legitimate heritage. Our fleet and five thousand Marines acted. If the British want to send an expedition, we will receive this anachronistic colonial expedition with the appropriate honors. In 1806 and 1807 the Argentine people with very little means acted against the British forces. (Here Galtieri referred to an episode during which the British attempted to conquer colonial Argentina. Lord Beresford was captured by the Argentines and interned at the religious shrine at Lujan.)

General Galtieri said that his remarks are the prologue to our conversation. He repeated that the Argentines have the best disposition possible toward Margaret Thatcher, but find it difficult to assist her in light of her strident posture.

Secretary Haig replied to President Galtieri that he was pleased and welcomed the President's perceptive analysis. He felt that he knew the President well because he had heard so much about him from General Walters and Jeane Kirkpatrick. The Secretary agreed that there is a universal brotherhood among military men, despite national differences. We have a commonality of approach, an ethical understanding that permits free interchange. He found this true at NATO where often the political officials got caught up on technical difficulties. The brotherhood of professional military men, however, were able to elevate themselves beyond contemporary political pressures and with detachment to get to the heart of matters of vital interest to the people. Secretary Haig continued that he had watched over the years with special concern the valiant struggle of the Argentine people against the dark forces of Marxism and radicalism. "Too often in my own country people forget the basic stake that we have is a fundamental struggle that is going on in the world against the threat of Russian and Marxist imperialists. We are grateful for the direction in which Argentina is moving. In recent months we have seen not empty rhetoric, but real cooperation; we have seen your contribution to the solidarity of the hemisphere, and your understanding of the threat presented by the Soviets. We feel that many of the Soviet recent actions were taken in the light of what they perceive to be US weakness. They are aggressive and more dangerous. Following our failure in VietNam, we witnessed the Soviets or their proxies move against Angola, Ethiopia, South Yemen, Kampuchea, and Afghanistan. They concluded that, despite our vast resources, our self-paralysis made these fruits ripe for plucking. Throughout this period the Argentine professional military conducted a successful struggle despite the unjustified criticism from other parts of the world. Today the same vital struggle continues in Central America. I know the President understands the character of

this struggle and understands the essential character of the partnership which we have forged in recent months. We cannot allow this to be broken up by a "thousand Scottish shepherds." The Secretary told President Galtieri that the reports that the US has furnished intelligence and satellite information to the UK are untrue. We denied the British request. As a matter of principle we feel that allies should not spy on each other. Our satellite, moreover, was not in a position to collect data from this area. Had it been, we would not have furnished it to the British. He gave President Galtieri his personal guarantee. The story was planted by the leftists in England to use against Mrs. Thatcher. They contended that she had advance knowledge and had taken no action. The story had the additional advantage of putting the US in an unfavorable light. President Galtieri thanked him for these assurances.

Secretary Haig said the first indication we had of the present crisis was from the UK. General Galtieri laughed and said the Argentines were good professionals and were able to cover up the operation. Secretary Haig agreed that the conduct of the cover for the operation was masterful. General Galtieri said that the Argentines had issued strong orders that no one was to be shot. Consequently, although four Argentines were killed, two more seriously injured, and some six others wounded, there were no British casualties. The Argentines made a special effort to avoid physical damage to the island. The only shots fired were by the British.

The Secretary repeated "that the stakes are profound in our global struggle. Even while we follow the Malvinas crisis hour by hour, and as I speak to you, the struggle continues in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Mexico. Mexico is a serious problem. The Communist penetration into the whole of Mexico is far more extensive than any other nation is willing to admit." The Secretary recalled that when he was at the UN, the Mexicans kidnapped a Nicaraguan volunteer with the Salvadoran rebel forces from the naive Salvadoran police. Castaneda, the Mexican Foreign Minister, invited this student to speak at the UN and also invited Jaime Wheelock up from Nicaragua to meet the press. The Secretary warned Castaneda that he had in his pocket a five page confession by this Nicaraguan in which he clearly implicated Mexico. This confession made reference to five camps in southern Mexico run by Mexican, Soviet, and Cuban personnel. The evidence also implicated the Mexican PRI party. The Secretary promised Castaneda that if he made any public statement about the Nicaraguan the Secretary would read this confession to the press. Castaneda said, "Please don't do that, please don't do that." Castaneda told the press that the version he received came from the Nicaraguans. He could not verify it himself. Mexico is a real problem.

In the face of all these difficulties it is vital that we maintain an understanding and cooperation. General Galtieri said he fully agreed

with what the Secretary had said. He then told the Secretary of his news that at midnight last night a Cuban plane arrived from Havana carrying Ambassador Aragonés, a former Cuban ambassador to Mexico, bringing an urgent letter for President Galtieri from Fidel Castro. He knew that the plane had arrived, but had not yet received the letter. Returning to the Malvinas issue, President Galtieri said that while they do not know what Chileans might do, neither do the Chileans know what Peru will do. The Argentines know what both the Peruvian and Bolivian armed forces think. The implications here are ominous. The Argentine President said that he remembered well that a small incident at Sarajevo had led to an uncontrollable conflagration.²

With respect to Cuba, the Secretary then told President Galtieri in confidence that we had completed planning and if the Cubans move into Nicaragua we will take military action. Next Monday or Tuesday³ we could have indications of just such Cuban actions. We have a large concentration of naval vessels in the Caribbean this month. We may be provided with the opportunity we have been seeking. The Secretary stressed that he told President Galtieri this because of his and President Reagan's great respect for him and his government. He pointed out that this adds to the tragedy of this situation. President Galtieri must know that, if Great Britain continues on her present course, we would be the losers and the USSR and Cuba the principal beneficiaries. He could tell General Galtieri right now what the message from El Supremo (Castro) was. "Later you will undoubtedly get a message from the Soviets."

Margaret Thatcher is unquestionably the most vigorous leader of western Europe and has been extremely supportive to us on Polish and Afghanistan matters. To undermine this cooperation would also be a tragedy. She has in a sense boxed herself into a corner with imprudent rhetoric. When the Secretary was in London he met with her for five hours of discussion.⁴ At one point she said to the Secretary that she felt he was silent and disapproving. The Secretary replied that he was because Mrs. Thatcher is wrong to issue an ultimatum. An ultimatum makes the problem insoluble. The US government could not support it. He also told this to the British Foreign Minister earlier.⁵ We need greater flexibility. We desire to work out an interim solution that will provide two important and friendly leaders with a success. If the Secretary had a proposal that he could return to London with

² Reference is to the June 1914 assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria in Sarajevo, an event which helped precipitate the First World War.

³ April 12 or 13.

⁴ See Documents 80–82.

⁵ See Document 79.

which the United States considers just and fair it would be almost impossible for Margaret Thatcher to refuse. She could not. The problem for us now is how to structure such a proposal. The Secretary had no illusions that this would be easy. He told this to the Argentine Foreign Minister earlier that morning.⁶

We have naval intelligence suggesting that the British submarines plan to attack ships in the exclusion zone starting at 4:00 Monday morning. Galtieri said that that was a problem that Margaret Thatcher would have to worry about. The Secretary said that we could not condone an ultimative situation. We must move forward with urgency. If the UK fleet starts striking in Argentine waters the situation could become uncontrollable. History would condemn us for refusing to make sacrifices on a question of minor importance with major consequences. The Secretary said that we believe that we do have basis for a solution. If he did not look very vigorous it was because he spent all his time on the long flight the previous day trying to devise an approach which would be acceptable to Argentina and to the UK, one that would not require unacceptable concessions by either party. There is a precarious balance but he personally believes that we can maintain it. The ultimate sovereignty would reside with Argentina, a Hong Kong type solution would weaken the British claim and would not stop the internal agitation. We must avoid any apparent return to the status quo and go to a new level of intense negotiations leading to the imperatives for a solution for the Argentine government. The action the second of April was seen, in London, as excessive and he would be less than frank if he did not say that it would be very difficult to sell any such package to Margaret Thatcher in London. But if he were to obtain such a package it would not be easy for her to cast it aside.

President Galtieri said that in this pleasant conversation he would say something once and he would not repeat it again. As far as the Argentines are concerned there will be no question about Argentine sovereignty. Everything else Argentina is disposed to negotiate. He asked the Foreign Minister to say something about this. The FM then recalled that the UN Resolution 502 has three points. One is the cessation of hostilities. Two is the withdrawal of forces. And three is negotiation. The UK is proposing the cessation of hostilities, but there are no hostilities now. The hostilities have ceased; but Margaret Thatcher has launched her fleet. Argentina had fulfilled the requirement for cessation. Argentina was disposed to withdraw their forces if the British

⁶ No memoranda of conversation of Haig's exchanges with Costa Mendez on the morning of April 10 have been found. For Haig's memoir account of his automobile ride with Costa Mendez to the Casa Rosada, see Haig, *Caveat*, p. 276.

withdrew their fleet. But Argentina would not withdraw its authorities. Anything else could be negotiated.

Secretary Haig said perhaps he should now speak in specific terms. The first thing to be done is to break the ultimative character of Margaret Thatcher's proposals. We must find an integrated comprehensive program based on the UN resolution which includes simultaneous withdrawal, creation of a zone excluding UK forces, an interim administration, perhaps with an international entity of some sort to break the umbilical line of control from London to the islands, recognition of autonomy or local government or local institutions that will permit avoiding, from the Argentine point of view, appearing to return to the status quo ante. Mrs. Thatcher's interests seem to be primarily in the local population and in maintaining a line of authority to the island. General Galtieri said that this would be very difficult. Secretary Haig agreed.

President Galtieri asked whether the entity of which the Secretary is speaking would be the UN or the US. Haig said he would offer a model of several different countries friendly and acceptable to both parties. For example, the US, Canada, perhaps Brazil and Peru or any countries that Argentina would feel comfortable with pending a final solution. He believed that would guarantee the situation for the thousand such shepherds who could go to New Zealand or anywhere else they wanted, if they were not happy. The FM said that the Argentines were disposed to compensate the shepherds. They offered them money to buy land in Argentina, 29 years loans, if they wanted a boat or plane to leave the Argentines would provide that. If they wanted to stay all their rights would be taken care of and they would have a more sophisticated or privileged status in the islands. In 1968 he was in London working with the FM. At the time he saw a draft agreement with the UK in which the UK agreed to the principle of transfer of sovereignty over the islands to Argentina. The agreement died because of a revolt in the British Parliament.

Secretary Haig said that the problem was one of contemporary politics—politics in London, politics in Buenos Aires. We must have success for we share a great deal in common. President Galtieri said that in London and other capitals of Europe including Paris, Bonn and Spain, they had shuddered when a few Argentine soldiers had gone to Central America to defend freedom and the culture of the West. No one had, however, shuddered when the British sent a fleet to defend islands that were not theirs. Is there a real difference?

Secretary Haig said we must remember one simple fact: if the Argentines persist Margaret Thatcher will fall. He must be frank. In the US the support for Great Britain is widespread. In the liberal world and in others the sentiment is overwhelmingly in favor of Great Britain and would remain so if it came to a confrontation.

Secretary Haig said that President Reagan is under attack even now for being evenhanded. Herblock⁷ had drawn a nasty cartoon. It is a political question, the left wing will seize it, it manages the press. We have ascertained that some 90% of the senior people in the press are supportive of the Democratic Party. General Galtieri said that with regard to the cessation of hostilities, the withdrawal of the Argentine fleet, and armed forces there are two points. He said there is one problem he could not see how to resolve. It is the question of the government of the islands. He was really regretful but the government must be Argentine with whatever entity the UN, the British, the US, or the Canadians might set up until normalization. The Argentines are prepared to offer the British facilities of every sort to join in developing the resources of the seabed, resources of fishing, for refueling British naval ships or aircraft; but Argentina is not disposed to step back from what it considers to be its rights.

Secretary Haig said he recognizes that this is the most difficult element, it is going to be extremely tough to resolve. He then asked President Galtieri how long he estimated it would take to remove the Argentine armed forces from the island. General Galtieri said four or five days. Admiral Moya interjected to say that he did not think this would be possible in so short a time and would probably require two weeks. Secretary Haig said that he agreed with that estimate. Secretary Haig then went on to say that we would have to use the UN Resolution 502 as a basis. The FM said he would like to see the wording. Secretary Haig said that between now and this evening he thought that the Americans and the Argentines might get together and work to see if they could prepare a draft. General Galtieri said that they might meet again at 6:00.⁸ The FM agreed. General Galtieri said that the Argentines did not want to fail. Secretary Haig said that in one form or another it would appear as an Argentine victory because the Argentines would eventually get the sovereignty of the islands; but we do not want the British to appear to lose. Secretary Haig said that it is important to consider this in the long term. Often one finds a military man who can rise above contemporary politics as Sadat⁹ had, although he did not want to draw an exact parallel. Galtieri laughed and said, yes, Sadat had come to a bad end. Secretary Haig said that it was important that this case not be approached from the perspective of grantor and grantee. General Galtieri said Argentina had been asking about this matter for a long time. Nothing had happened. It was then agreed between the

⁷ Nom de plume of *Washington Post* political cartoonist Herbert Block.

⁸ No memorandum of conversation of this meeting has been found, but see Document 92. For Haig's later recollection of this session, see Haig, *Caveat*, pp. 281–282.

⁹ Anwar al-Sadat, Egyptian President from 1970 until his assassination in 1981.

Secretary and the Argentine President that their staffs and the FM would get together to work on a draft.

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