

**138. Memorandum of Conversation<sup>1</sup>**

Buenos Aires, April 16, 1982, 10–10:30 p.m.

## PARTICIPANTS

U.S. Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig, Jr.  
Ambassador Harry Shlaudeman  
Ambassador Thomas Enders  
Ambassador Vernon Walters  
  
Argentinian Foreign Minister Costa Mendez  
Under Secretary Enrique Ros

The conversation was conducted entirely in English.

Foreign Minister Costa Mendez opened by saying that he had good news concerning the British marines and scientific personnel captured on South Georgia; they were safe. One American family and one other citizen from the Falklands would be arriving in Buenos Aires tomorrow. There is some confusion with the Swiss over the names.

The Foreign Minister then said he had met with President Galtieri and the Junta on the three points left in suspense. Paragraph 6 is okay. Regarding paragraph 10, the Argentine position is that always known to Ambassador Shlaudeman. He then showed the Americans the proposed Argentine version of this paragraph which demands an affirmation of Argentine sovereignty.<sup>2</sup>

The Secretary, after reading it, said that it was certain to be rejected in London. He asked whether the Foreign Minister had any flexibility on that paragraph. Costa Mendez replied that he had none; but that if it was accepted, then the Argentine position on paragraphs 6 and 8 would be easier.

The Secretary then said, "This means war." Ambassador Enders added that this is tantamount to a declaration of war.

Costa Mendez replied that this was simply the position Argentina had always maintained and that the UN Resolution affirmed.

Ambassador Enders said that there was quite frankly no mention of Argentine sovereignty in those resolutions. Costa Mendez replied that he honestly felt that the wording included the territorial integrity of Argentina.

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: Department of State, Executive Secretariat, Files of Vernon Walters, Lot 89D213, Trip to Buenos Aires (w/Secretary Haig); Spin-off to El Salvador/Honduras April 15–April 22, 1982. Top Secret; Sensitive. The conversation took place in Haig's suite at the Sheraton Hotel. The original handwritten version of the memorandum is *ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> See Document 141.

Ambassador Enders then asked whether the authorities of this country knew that their inflexibility meant war.

Costa Mendez replied that if the Secretary wanted to see the President and/or if President Reagan wanted to talk to the President, they could. He then asked whether the Secretary wanted to talk to the Junta.

The Secretary replied that he did. He had earned and deserved the opportunity to speak to them and tell them the consequences of their decision.

Costa Mendez replied that the Secretary had made superhuman efforts and deserved anything he wanted.

The Secretary said he would not want to go home without having had the opportunity to tell the Junta that their position probably means war as a consequence. He would not be hesitant to tell them.

Costa Mendez, visibly shocked, said that he felt he had been clear and honest and had been consistent in what he was saying all along.

The Secretary said that this would be a disaster for Argentina, and we would have to take a position in the case of an armed conflict.

Costa Mendez said it was not a consequence of any intransigence on the part of the Argentines.

The Secretary said he had made a real effort to bridge the gap between the two positions. He had told the Foreign Minister that neither side could obtain everything it wanted. He thought that everyone had seemed to accept that.

Costa Mendez then said that the Argentines had done their best.

The Secretary said he was willing to meet with the Junta; but it might be better to sleep on it and meet tomorrow.<sup>3</sup> Costa Mendez said he agreed that would be best and would give everyone time to reflect.

Secretary Haig said that he was sure the British would shoot when they received the message.

Costa Mendez said his advice was to wait until after the Secretary met with the Junta to send his message.

Ambassador Enders asked whether they had any doubt that this meant war with the British.

Costa Mendez said that the Argentines had not been in touch with the British; but he would rely on our word for it. He was surprised that the United Kingdom would go to the edge of war for such a small problem as these few rocky islands.

Ambassador Shlaudeman said that they would. Ambassador Enders said they would fight for the same reason as the Argentines would fight—for honor.

---

<sup>3</sup> See Document 142.

Costa Mendez replied that the Argentines had put up with this problem for 149 years.

Secretary Haig said that there was the same imperative on both sides. The judgment of history would be serious.

Costa Mendez said that they should sleep on the matter and thanked the Secretary for the efforts he had made.