

243. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, May 8, 1982

PARTICIPANTS

Carlos Guillermo
General Sanchez Mason, retired from Argentine Army
Mr. Francisco Aguirre, Co-owner, *Diario de las Americas*
Vernon A. Walters, Ambassador-at-Large

SUBJECT

Falkland Islands

At the request of Francisco Aguirre, a co-owner of *Diario de las Americas* and perhaps the best informed man in Washington on Latin American affairs, I met with retired Argentine General Sanchez Mason at the Army Navy Club. Deputy Assistant Secretary Bosworth concurred that the meeting should take place.

Sanchez Mason contended that former Argentine President and retired Army General Viola sent him to alert me that many Argentine officers, particularly Army officers, are extremely disturbed by the Argentine occupation of the Falkland Islands and the subsequent events.² He explained that he now works for MACK trucks and is using his business connection as a pretext for his visit. Prior to his retirement, however, he was, consecutively, in charge of suppression of the guerrillas, Commander of the Fifth Corps (the forces used in the Falklands), Commander of the Third Corps in Cordoba, Commander of the First Corps in Buenos Aires, and Chief of Staff of the Army.

When Anaya was Chief of Navy Planning, he developed plans for the occupation of the three Beagle Islands and another for the Falklands; but Videla³ rejected them in 1978 because of the damage either would have done to Argentine relations with Great Britain and the U.S. When Admiral Anaya became head of the Navy, he allied with Galtieri to oust Viola from the Presidency. (Anaya is the most belligerent of the

¹ Source: Department of State, Executive Secretariat, Files of Alexander M. Haig, Jr., 1981-1982, Lot 82D370, (3) Falklands Crisis 1982. Secret. All brackets are in the original. The meeting took place at the Army-Navy Club. At the top of the memorandum, Goldberg wrote: "Import—the message of unrest in B.A." Also at the top of the memorandum, an additional notation in an unknown hand reads: "Final version 5/12/82. ARA probably will send by cable to B.A."

² Goldberg drew a bracket in the left-hand margin next to this sentence.

³ Goldberg circled "Videla" and drew a line from the circle to the bottom of the page where he wrote "Viola?"

three Junta members, Galtieri, the most excitable, and Lamidozo, the most thoughtful and moderate.) For some reason, perhaps church pressure, Anaya then pressured Galtieri to support him in the seizure of the Falklands as a repayment. Foreign Minister Costa Mendez assured the military that (a) the Soviets would veto any kind of anti-Argentine resolution in the UN, (b) that Argentina could rely on Soviet assistance and (c) in any event, the British would not fight. He knew the British and could guarantee they would not go to war over the Falklands. [General Sanchez Mason added as an aside that Costa Mendez is the biggest liar in Argentina.⁴ Sanchez Mason knew the Foreign Minister pretended to the U.S. that he knew nothing of the operation before it happened.]

The original plan called for the occupation to occur in May, but the Navy forced the issue early by sending Naval personnel ashore in South Georgia disguised as civilian workers to dismantle the whaling station. The British reaction coupled with domestic strife with the Peronistas triggered the landing. Of the five corps commanders, only General Garcia of the Fifth Corps knew of the operation well in advance. The others were given only 48 hours notice. Troops moved under cover of exercises and maneuvers. The corps commanders, who were kept in the dark, harbor a certain amount of resentment.

Since the landing and occupation General Galtieri announced to a meeting of active and retired generals of the Army, that he told Secretary Haig that Argentina, if backed to the wall, would take help from any source, including the Soviet Union. This greatly disturbed the generals. They now perceive the Junta, Sanchez Mason explained, as having led Argentina into a foolish fight with old friends in Great Britain and the United States over islands Argentina would inevitably get anyway. Argentina is running the risk of destroying the OAS and endangering the ability of the West to defend its values—values prized by the Argentine military.

I asked him which officers felt this way. He cited General Vaquero, Chief of Staff of the Army; General Nicolaidis, Commander of the First Corps in Buenos Aires; General Trimarco, Commander of the Second Corps, and many junior officers.

General Sanchez Mason stressed that he came to seek no assistance but merely to ask for understanding “when something happens”. He feels that the Argentine Junta will not negotiate under the present

⁴ Goldberg underlined the portion of the sentence beginning with “Costa Mendez” and ending with the word “Argentina.”

circumstances. They must be “knocked around a little more”. He is convinced the British can do it. He also pooh-poohed the claim that the U.S. gave the British information that led to the sinking of the cruiser, *Belgrano*, saying that he had some knowledge of British intelligence—they were quite capable of doing all these things by themselves. He felt that after the Argentines had sustained a few more reverses, they might be ripe for listening to something reasonable. He again hinted that he hoped he would have our understanding if and when “something happened”. Viola is anxious to keep the U.S. advised of developments in Argentina. He had also been in touch in Buenos Aires with Mr. Friedman and Ambassador Shlaudeman. The Navy got Argentina into the mess; the Air Force has helped save the Navy’s face by sinking the *Sheffield*. The moderates plan to move after the Junta sustains further reverses.

Mr. Aguirre, LCDR Martiny, General Sanchez Mason, Carlos Guilermo, and myself were the only people present.