

84. Telegram From the Department of State to Secretary of State Haig's Aircraft¹

Washington, April 9, 1982, 0643Z

Tosec 50043. Subject: Action Memorandum: UK Request for Additional Support on Ascension Island. To the Secretary from EUR—H. Allen Holmes, Acting, ARA—Everett Briggs, Acting, PM—Richard Burt.

1. Issue for Decision: Whether to accede to a UK request for additional support on Ascension Island.

2. Essential Factors: As foreshadowed in earlier memoranda to you, the UK now has now requested additional US support at Ascension Island. This memorandum provides a legal analysis of the options and recommends a positive response, if your reading of the situation on the ground so permits.

The UK is formally requesting (A) that the US arrange for Wideawake to operate on a 24-hour basis for the time being to allow for maintenance operations and (B) that additional air controllers be provided by the US. The UK has also indicated that it plans to locate various communication facilities on the Island and a met facility and that it "shall require" facilities for three commando brigades. Text of UK request received by Department evening of April 8 is at para 3.

On April 2 you decided the US should agree to sell fuel to the UK at Ascension.² As you are aware, the 1962 exchange of notes between the US and the UK on the use of Wideawake Airfield on Ascension Island by UK military aircraft obligates the US to permit the UK to land at Wideawake and to use the facilities in the event that the UK considers additional logistic, administrative or operating facilities to be necessary at the airfield. You determined that the provision of fuel was legitimately encompassed by the obligation to let the UK use the facilities on Ascension. The new request, however, appears to the Legal Adviser's office to have elements that go beyond our legal obligation to permit the UK to use the facility. The 1962 agreement does not obligate us to provide additional services and clearly does not constitute

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, P880104-0758. Secret; Immediate; Nodis. Sent for information Immediate to USDel Secretary. Drafted by E. Cummings (L/PM); cleared by R. Haas, Pendleton, and J. Earle (L/ARA); approved in S/S-O. A stamped notation at the top right-hand corner of the telegram indicates that Haig saw it. An additional notation in an unknown hand reads: "Sec. acted upon in Secto 24—hold off on grey areas." Reference is presumably to telegram Secto 5024; see footnote 4 below.

² See Document 51.

an obligation on the part of the US to assign military personnel to support the UK operations in a direct manner in potential combat operations, nor would it appear to obligate us to provide additional air controllers.

However, the agreement also contemplates that the US and UK will coordinate their actions to avoid interference in US operations when the UK uses the facilities. Consequently, though not technically required under the agreement, the UK request to operate the airfield on a 24 hour basis and to provide additional air controllers is justifiable on the basis of the increased operational strain on US operations and the limited nature of the air traffic activities. The other British requests are clearly within the scope of the agreement, and the UK has the right to establish the facilities they have proposed.

Recommendation:

That you inform the British that we can agree to their overall request, based on the increased activity at Ascension Island. We are well aware that your response to this recommendation will depend on your reading of the state of play following your April 8 London talks.³

Approve _____ Disapprove _____⁴

3. Text of UK message of April 8 re Ascension. (UK Embassy informed us request being made concurrently and in much greater detail through military channels to DOD). Begin text:

We wish to use airfield for two Nimrod aircraft in order to conduct maritime reconnaissance operations on a 24-hour basis for an indefinite period (since their missions will be coordinated with our submarine forces 24 hour cover is essential). We should therefore be grateful if the US would arrange for the airfield to operate on a 24-hour basis for the time being. We realise that this will involve the provision of

³ See Documents 79, 81, and 82.

⁴ At 1435Z, April 9, Haig replied to Eagleburger: "Proceed with only those elements of UK request which clearly fall within range of our treaty commitment. Concerning grey areas, such as assignment of additional air controllers, you should address the issue indicating that we will view the request sympathetically but in an upbeat manner without committing ourselves to approval at this time. We first need to make an assessment in wake of result of Buenos Aires stop this weekend—and possible return to London. I am concerned that approval at this point would quickly become known to Argentines, with unhelpful impact on upcoming talks with Argentines. We recognize that the practical effect of this guidance is that 24 hour operation of Wide-Awake will not likely be possible for time-being unless it can be attained without using additional air controllers. If British convey sense of great urgency, you should get back to me. But my thinking now is that it would be a great mistake to agree to the request for air controllers while I am in Buenos Aires." (Telegram Secto 5024 from Haig, April 9; Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, P880104-0762)

additional air controllers as foreshadowed in earlier message.⁵ Meanwhile air transport force operations will continue on the present scale. We also plan to locate various communications facilities on the Island and a met facility. In addition we shall require facilities for three commando brigades as earlier mentioned.

A senior officer has now been appointed as Commander of the British Forces Support Unit and has been instructed to liaise as required with the Commander of the US Forces Ascension Island on all matters of detail. End text.

4. The message referred to above "as earlier mentioned" is with your staff as an attachment to a bullet paper entitled "Your Meeting with UK Ambassador Henderson, 4/6/82".⁶

5. Please assure that Assistant Secretary Enders sees this message as it goes to the Secretary.

6. Cleared by: PM:RHaas, FWG:MSPendleton, L/ARA: JEarle. Drafted by: L/PM:ECummings.

Eagleburger

⁵ Reference is to an April 6 message from Wall to Pendleton which stated that the British Embassy had been asked by HMG "to let you know that later expansion of forces could require reception and staging facilities for 3500 men: a logistic base would require 200 men for the reception, storage and onward movement of combat supplies." In addition, regarding "other longer term requirements," Wall specified that one "particular requirement will be for additional air controllers to allow for 24-hour operations." (Department of State, Executive Secretariat, S/S Special Handling Restrictions Memos 1979-1983, Lot 96D262, ES Sensitive April 1-9 1982)

⁶ A copy of the undated bullet paper is *ibid.* For a summary of that meeting, see Document 71.