

**178. Memorandum From Secretary of State Haig to
President Reagan¹**

Washington, April 26, 1982

SUBJECT

Falklands Crisis—Proposed Call to General Galtieri

While we cannot be sure, the only safe assumption at this stage is that the British will attack the Falklands as soon as their forces are positioned to do so. If they choose to wait until they have all or most of their Task Force on-scene, this could be a day or two away. If instead they decide to bombard the airfield, in order to neutralize Argentine air power before they bring in the bulk of the Task Force, the action could begin within the next twelve hours.

¹ Source: Reagan Library, Executive Secretariat, NSC Country File, Latin America/Central, Falklands War (04/22/1982–05/17/1982). Secret; Sensitive. There is no indication that Reagan saw the memorandum. A typewritten notation on another copy of the memorandum indicates that a copy was sent by LDX to Clark at 1820 hours and another copy to the NSC by special courier at 1838 hours, both on April 26. (Department of State, Executive Secretariat, S/S Special Handling Restrictions Memos 1979–1983, Lot 96D262, ES Sensitive April 24–26 1982)

I have proposed to Costa Mendez that I come to Buenos Aires tonight.² There is, however, a serious chance that the junta will reject this, particularly coming via Costa Mendez, whose instructions are to avoid discussions. Only a call from you to Galtieri would give us a reasonable chance of convincing the junta to receive me. I recommend you call Galtieri. You may wish to draw on the attached talking points.³

My going to Buenos Aires may at least cause the British to refrain from attacking the Falklands for another day or two. Whether we can achieve a negotiating break-through is more problematical. Our proposal should now look much more appealing to the Argentines, considering the alternatives. However, this would require a higher level of rationality than may prevail in Buenos Aires. The military hard-liners may now hold the view that no agreement is possible until Argentine pride can be avenged.

Nevertheless, we have no choice but to make this move. If we wait, the British will adopt a more lop-sided negotiating position—of the sort they floated, then retracted, this morning.⁴ And, of course, once the battle for the Falklands commences, there will be no room for effective US diplomacy.⁵

² No memorandum of conversation of this meeting, held following the OAS MFM on April 26, has been found. In his memoirs, Haig wrote of this meeting: "I met with Costa Méndez, telling him that within forty-eight hours, the British would almost certainly strike again, bombarding airfields, launching commando raids. 'We have no more time,' I said. 'The American proposal is fair and reasonable. If necessary, we will go public with it and let the world judge why these negotiations have produced no result.' In Costa Méndez, I sensed a reluctance to forward the U.S. proposal. He told me that there was a virulent anti-American and anti-Haig atmosphere building in the country and in the junta. I offered to return to Buenos Aires and deliver the text to Galtieri and the junta myself. Although I did not disclose the thought to Costa Mendez, I believed that the British would not carry out further attacks if the American Secretary of State was in Argentina or en route. I asked that the junta inform me within twenty-four hours whether they could receive me. Costa Mendez promised to pass on the message." (Haig, *Caveat*, p. 291)

³ Attached but not printed.

⁴ See Document 175 and footnote 4 thereto.

⁵ According to the President's Daily Diary, no telephone call was placed by Reagan to Galtieri. (Reagan Library, President's Daily Diary)