

212. Letter From Secretary of State Haig to British Foreign Secretary Pym¹

Washington, May 3, 1982

Dear Francis:

In his letter to the Prime Minister last Thursday,² President Reagan expressed the view that, whatever happens militarily, there must be a negotiated solution to the Falklands crisis if we are to avoid open-ended hostility and instability. The Prime Minister and you have made clear to the world your commitment—which has never been in doubt here—to reaching a settlement.

We are concerned that your military successes have not had the desired effect of making the Argentines more reasonable. Our assessment is that the fatalistic mentality characteristic of the Argentines is becoming stronger with each setback. Paradoxically—and tragically—the Argentines may well be waiting, and trying, for a military success of their own before making a serious move toward a settlement. Such a strategy would be consistent with everything we know about the Argentines.

This confronts us with the danger that as the military situation gets worse for the Argentines—whether or not Galtieri survives—you will be left with no alternative but a major long-term military burden. We know that you are prepared for this, but also that you would strongly prefer to secure your objective through an agreement.

We are also concerned that international opinion will increasingly reflect a belief, however untrue, that British military action is the principal obstacle to a peaceful solution. This misperception will grow if it appears that the United Kingdom, in light of its recent victories, is not prepared to take an initiative to achieve peace. This line of argument will only make it easier for the Argentines to evade the onus for the diplomatic impasse, not to mention harder for you to sustain international support. A final concern is that our decision clearly and fully to support you requires that we defend your actions in the face of an increasingly hostile hemispheric reaction. We will both need to do all we can to conserve support.

It therefore seems to us that this is the best moment to show concretely that you are exhausting the possibilities for a settlement, and

¹ Source: Department of State, Executive Secretariat, S/S Special Handling Restrictions Memos 1979–1983, Lot 96D262, ES Sensitive May 1–5 1982. Secret.

² April 29. See Document 190.

indeed, perhaps the last clear opportunity for an actual breakthrough, if our forecast of Argentine reactions to further military reverses is true. We would like to offer a suggestion in this spirit.

We suggest that the United States and Peru make a further peace proposal to the parties, stipulating that they have forty-eight hours in which to accept or reject it, with it understood that no response constitutes rejection. This period could begin at noon Washington time Wednesday.³

To maximize the pressure on the Argentines to accept a fair proposal, and to deal with the political problems I outlined above, we suggest that Her Majesty's Government announce, at the time of presentation of the proposal by the United States and Peru, that British forces will take no offensive action during the forty-eight hour period, provided the Argentines show corresponding restraint. I have enclosed a suggested statement that reflects our best sense of how this offer might be cast so as to avoid any potential for Argentine humiliation and therefore rejection.⁴ The choice of the Wednesday noon starting point would give you time to verify that the Argentines give the appropriate orders.

You would obviously want to enter such a period knowing that you would not bear the blame if it failed to produce results. The proposal we would make is enclosed.⁵ It reflects our recent discussions, and we believe it ought to be acceptable to you. If you agree to this approach, I am confident we can get Peruvian agreement to co-sponsor the proposal.

Unless there is an arrangement for suspending military action for a brief, fixed period of intensive diplomatic effort, I am afraid that the Argentines and others will succeed in blaming failure to achieve a political settlement on your military actions. Conversely, if there is a UK initiative of the sort I have suggested to accompany a new proposal, you will have shored up your international support and, if it succeeds, established a basis for an acceptable settlement. Having given the Argentines temporary relief from hostilities so that they could consider the new proposal, and being in a position to accept it yourselves,

³ May 5.

⁴ Attached but not printed, the text of the proposed statement reads: "British forces would be ordered to refrain from offensive action in the general area for a 48-hour period commencing at 1600 GMT Wednesday, May 5, provided that Argentine naval and air forces would be willing to stand clear of the islands by at least 200 nautical miles, would not take threatening action against British forces elsewhere, and would not resupply units on the islands during this period. Should agreement not be reached by the end of the 48-hour period, existing rules of engagement would be re-established."

⁵ The seven-point peace proposal is attached but not printed.

it would be clear that you have done everything possible to avert further conflict.

We are convinced that an initiative along these lines is what it will take to open up the possibility for a peaceful solution.⁶

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Haig, Jr.⁷

⁶ On this new set of proposals, Henderson later wrote that “the Americans were not at all deterred by the sinking [of the *General Belgrano*] from pursuing their attempts at a diplomatic solution. Haig sent Enders, the Under-Secretary at the State Department dealing with Latin America [*sic*], round to see me to discuss amendments to the Peruvian plan. This was followed by a lengthy session I had with Haig after which he put fresh proposals to London and Buenos Aires.” (Henderson, *Mandarin*, p. 456) A British record of Henderson’s May 3 meeting with Haig is published on the Thatcher Foundation website.

⁷ Printed from a copy with this typed signature.