

253. **Message From the Ambassador to Argentina (Shlaudeman) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Enders)**¹

Buenos Aires, May 12, 1982, 1540Z

[*telegram number not declassified*] For Assistant Secretary Enders from Shlaudeman. Subject: Walters Visit.² Ref: [*less than 1 line not declassified*].³

On Tuesday May 11 at 7 p.m. I⁴ saw President Galtieri at his private apartment at 179 Calle 11 de Septiembre in Buenos Aires. Present were

¹ Source: Department of State, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Miscellaneous Files, March 1981–February 1983, Lot 83D210, Falklands [Folder 1]. Secret; Niact Immediate.

² Haig wrote that Walters's mission to Buenos Aires "eliminated any possibility that the desperate leaders of Argentina would collaborate in their last moments with the Soviet Union." (Haig, *Caveat*, p. 295)

³ In the reference message, Shlaudeman conveyed a brief summary report of Walters's May 11 evening meeting with Galtieri and his May 12 morning meeting with Lami Dozo. Shlaudeman noted that Walters had "so far detected no dramatic breakthrough" with the Argentines. Walters, the Ambassador continued, "does perceive somewhat less emphasis on sovereignty and more on 'equal rights' for Argentines and British on the Islands during the interim period. You know what that means." Shlaudeman also reported that Galtieri was attempting to arrange a meeting between Walters and Anaya. (Telegram 990 from Buenos Aires, May 12; Department of State, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Miscellaneous Files, March 1981–February 1983, Lot 83D210, Falklands [Folder 1])

⁴ Walters.

President Galtieri, General Sotera—G-2 Argentine Army, Ambassador Walters and LCDR. Martiny. The entire conversation was in Spanish.

President greeted me effusively with a big bear hug and said that before anything else he wanted to thank me for having traveled so far.

I said that 20,000 klms was a small distance to travel if it could save one human life. Secretary Haig asked me to say that we have an enduring desire that some way can be found, in the United Nations or elsewhere to solve honorably the Malvinas problem. The Secretary is convinced that we must look beyond this problem to our important long term relationship. We must prevent a scission of the OAS into Spanish speaking and English speaking factions. I said Secretary Haig asked me to tell Galtieri of our continuing desire to see this war between friends settled peacefully. NATO remains a vital barrier to Soviet expansion in Europe.

He noted the remarks I made yesterday in Washington about the machismo of women being even more sensitive than that of men.⁵ He agreed the war is a pointless conflict between two nations whose interests everything [*everywhere?*] should bind them together. He looks forward to the day when he can shake hands with Mrs. Thatcher. General Sotera said that she was through. President Galtieri disagreed. The British do not react that way and she has just won her municipal elections.

I answered that we believed that he alone has the authority to achieve a settlement favorable and fair to both sides. Any rumors he might have heard that the U.S. is plotting against him at any level, are absolutely false. I gave him my word of honor as a U.S. Army officer that there is no truth to those rumors. (Embassy told me before my meeting that rumors of the CIA plotting against him are widespread in Buenos Aires). He accepted my assurances. I said such action would be folly on our part. He had proved his leadership and his friendship towards us.

He then assured me that the Argentines would continue to support us in Central America. In fact General Sotera had just returned from there.

⁵ In a May 10 briefing at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, Walters was reported to have described the South Atlantic crisis as a "silly war" and a "conflict of two machismos." Citing a British press report of the event, the Embassy in London reported that Walters "said he was not attributing blame but, in an obvious reference to Mrs. Thatcher, added 'The machismo of woman is even more sensitive than the machismo of men.'" (Telegram 10420 from London, May 11; Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, D820247-0421)

Galtieri said that Secretary Weinberger's blunt statements⁶ are causing anti-American feelings to grow in the armed forces and while he understands that we might feel the need to side with Britain, he hopes we can tone down these statements. President Galtieri observed that the evacuation of U.S. Embassy personnel from Buenos Aires⁷ caused an unfavorable impression in the armed services. He had assured me previously that Argentina is not Iran. It is a civilized Western country and he will not tolerate any terrorism against U.S. citizens.

President Galtieri said that Argentine public opinion is inflamed by the armed conflict, not only against the UK but against the U.S. as well. He said that while he understood that the U.S. would eventually have to side with the UK, it could have been done more gently. If Spain and the UK get into a conflict over Gibraltar he will have to side with Spain. I said that he should not have seemed surprised. The Secretary had told him several times that if the negotiations broke down, we would have to do this. He acknowledged that fact but regretted the strong language used.

He said that after the sinking of the *Belgrano*, the Argentines badly needed a success. I pointed out the sinking of the *Sheffield* was a considerable success and that now we have a unique opportunity to overcome the major obstacles to an agreement. These are the Argentine insistence upon prejudging the sovereignty issue and the British insistence upon self determination for the inhabitants. I thought we were moving on the latter and we had sensed, perhaps mistakenly, some Argentine movement on the former. If we could overcome these two difficulties we would be well on the way towards an honorable solution.

He asked what guarantee the Argentines would have of eventual sovereignty. What could he tell his people they had gotten for their sacrifices. Several hundred Argentines have been killed. I said that the contact group, as I understood it, would ensure that the negotiations were successfully concluded in a predetermined period of time.

General Sotera said that the fighting made this problem more difficult. I replied that more fighting would further complicate it. I am not trying to negotiate wording merely to point out, as a friend, our perception of the sticking points. I appealed to them to seize this opportunity before the conflict escalates further.

⁶ Not further identified, but possibly statements that Weinberger may have made in Brussels at the NATO Defense Ministers meeting. A communiqué issued on May 6 by the Defense Ministers strongly supported the United Kingdom and condemned Argentina's "armed invasion" of the Falklands. (Paul Lewis, "Briton Demands Total Withdrawal by Argentina," *New York Times*, May 7, p. A15)

⁷ See Document 210 and footnote 3 thereto.

President Galtieri asked how long I planned to remain in Buenos Aires. I answered that I planned to leave on the evening of May 12; but if there is anyone he wanted me to see, I am entirely at his disposal and can remain another day. I told President Galtieri that Air Force Commander Brig. Lami Dozo called the Embassy in Buenos Aires to ask to talk to me. I delayed answering him until I could ask President Galtieri if he wanted me to talk to him. Galtieri replied that he told Lami Dozo I was here and had no objection whatever to my talking to him.⁸ Galtieri said he would be busy tomorrow morning but would keep in touch with me through General Sotera, if he wanted me to talk to anyone else. He said the Navy is absolutely convinced that we are passing ship locations to the British in the area around the Falklands. I replied that our exchanges with the British are normal ones, involving primarily the Soviets and the Chinese. The British have excellent and sophisticated sources of their own for the South Atlantic.

President Galtieri said he heard that the British asked U.S. for KC-135 air-to-air refueling tankers for their aircraft in flight.⁹ I replied that I personally did not know of any such request. The British have Victor tankers that enable them to refuel their Vulcan bombers. He said the British had not used any Vulcans in the fighting at the Islands. That the bombing had all been done by Sea Harriers. I told him that the British did not tell us of their military operations in advance; but I was quite sure they had used Vulcans. (Comment: He let the matter drop but if he really believes that they did not use Vulcans it would seem Argentine commanders in the Islands are not reporting accurately.) He commented humorously that he was looking for a substantial contribution from Exocet as their stock had gone way up following the sinking of the *Sheffield*.

He spoke of his attachment to the United States and for Army Chief of Staff Shy Meyer in particular. He wanted to look beyond current events to continuing our close association. I reminded him that I told him earlier that I did not know who would win the battle for the Malvinas, but that the only winner of the war would be the Soviet Union. He agreed. So did Sotera, reluctantly.

⁸ See Document 254.

⁹ A May 11 *New York Times* article, which cited comments by "Administration officials" the previous day, reported that the United Kingdom "asked the United States to lend the Royal Air Force a long-range KC-135 aerial tanker to refuel British bombers and reconnaissance planes based on Ascension Island in the South Atlantic." The article continues: "The officials said that no decision had been made on the request but that a reply to London was expected within the next 48 hours. They emphasized that no United States airmen would fly the plane, if the loan were made." (Richard Halloran, "Britain Asks U.S. to Lend It an Air Force Tanker," *New York Times*, May 11, p. A7)

I thanked him for the efficient and discreet way in which my arrival at the airport was handled. He said that he much appreciated the Secretary's sending me such a great distance. He knew I was a friend. He would be pondering what I told him and would get back to me on May 12 through Sotera, probably in the afternoon. In the meantime I was free to talk to Lami Dozo.

As I left, he said that he would seek help but not at the price of letting the Soviets have any say in Argentina.

He again assured me that U.S. personnel would be protected.

Any massive invasion of the Islands would greatly aggravate the problem.

He accepted my assurances that neither the Ambassador nor anyone else in the Embassy was plotting against him, but suggested that they keep a low profile at present.

He noted what I told him about the sticking points and looked forward to talking to me again. He asked me to convey his best wishes to the Secretary and General Meyer.

His attitude while not evidencing any additional give was as friendly toward me as it has ever been. He, too, clearly looks beyond the present crisis and wants to control damage to U.S./Argentine relations. He was clearly very pleased by my reassurance of friendship toward him and his government. Conversation lasted two hours.

He gave me a bear hug as we parted.