

76. Editorial Note

On the morning of April 7, 1982, the National Security Planning Group (NSPG) met in the White House Situation Room from 8:34 to 9:15 a.m. to discuss the situation in the South Atlantic. (Reagan Library, President's Daily Diary) No memorandum of conversation of this meeting has been found. President Ronald W. Reagan, who chaired the meeting, wrote briefly of the meeting in his personal diary: "8:10 A.M. meeting on So. Atlantic problem then off to Barbados." (Reagan, *Diaries*, p. 122) National Security Council (NSC) Staff Member James M. Rentschler also wrote of the meeting in his own personal diary: "I reported in earlier than usual [the morning of April 7]—and found myself assigned as notetaker in a hurriedly-convened NSPG." (Rentschler, "Falklands Diary," fo. 151) The meeting was chaired by Reagan and attended by Vice President George H.W. Bush, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs William P. Clark, Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig, Jr., Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinber-

ger, Permanent Representative to the United Nations Jeane Kirkpatrick, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General David Jones, and Deputy Director of Central Intelligence Admiral Bobby Ray Inman.

In his memoirs, based upon his personal diary and published after his death in 2007, Rentschler provided a detailed—and colorful—account of the April 7 NSPG and its immediate aftermath:

“Sit Room, White House, April 7, 1982. The National Security Planning Group this morning—NSPG being an invention of my new boss, Judge Bill Clark, to finesse the large numbers of people, not to mention their press leaks, which forever crowd a formal statutory convening of the full NSC. We’ve got the nation’s core group of top decisionmakers here, chaired by RAWHIDE [Reagan] himself—a *very* relaxed RAWHIDE, sportily attired in blazer and open-neck blue shirt (he’ll move directly from here to the Caribbean, start of an Easter vacation in Barbados, home of his longtime Hollywood pal Claudette Colbert). My government-issue ball-point flies low over the steno pad, filling page after page from the mouths of crisis-managers:

“Judge Clark: The subject is U.S. posture concerning the Falklands. The main issues, should the U.S. decide to intervene, are *why, when,* and *how.* Bobby, let’s have CIA’s latest information.

“Adm. Bobby Ray Inman, Deputy DCI: We see signs of increasing Argentine nervousness. The UK has declared this 200-mile maritime exclusion zone around the Falklands, and Argentine naval vessels appear to have backed off from the outer limits. Meanwhile, the Brit load-out continues, they are dead serious and mobilizing everything they can get into the water.

“Clark: Does this square with the info your people have, Cap?

“Sec. of Defense Cap Weinberger: Absolutely. And we have a few more details on the purely military aspects of the British deployment. They plan to get their subs in first, do as much damage as possible, and then proceed with a landing. Argentina is putting more troop strength ashore, but on balance our people believe the Brits have the edge.

[The following exchange between Bush and Weinberger refers to an April 6, 1982, ABC-TV report that a U.S. SR-71 reconnaissance plane overflew the Falklands/Malvinas “before and after the Argentine invasion to gather intelligence that was shared with Britain.” On April 7, the Department of Defense issued a statement which described the report as “completely untrue.” (John M. Goshko, “Reagan Sending Haig to Britain, Argentina,” *Washington Post*, April 8, 1982, p. A22.)]

“Vice Pres. George Bush: How accurate is the ABC report on the SR-71? The one where the U.S. is allegedly providing Britain with detailed pictures of Argentine troop emplacements and ship positions we get from our spy aircraft?

Weinberger: Totally untrue. A typical piece of Soviet disinformation. What's true is that the Soviets have repositioned their own satellites and may be supplying Argentina with info on Brit fleet movements.

Inman: In fact, a key question mark for us at this juncture remains the Sovs. Are they getting ready to roil the waters here? We don't know for sure. This bears the closest possible watching.

RR [Reagan]: Soviet collusion with Argentina on a totally illegal invasion? If it came to that, I'd think we could sink the whole island with a couple of B-52s! (Gen. Davy Jones, JCS Chairman and Weinberger launch into a long droning rundown on airfields in the South Atlantic, technical MEGO stuff about runway lengths, cargo-load capacity, refueling radii, etc. while RR eyes the door with a how-soon-can-I-get *outta* here look).

SecState Haig: The two sides of the crisis shape up like this: *first*, we have the UK in a very warlike mood. Mrs. Thatcher recognizes that if this thing goes sour, her government could fall—Peter Carrington's principled resignation as Foreign Secretary showed the way. At the same time, she is super-sensitive about the 1956 Suez débâcle—she's not going to let England be humiliated this time around. *Second*, we have an increasingly nervous Argentina, maybe looking for a way out. The Foreign Minister down there, Costa Mendez, definitely wants your help, Mr. President. I think we've got a window of 72 hours here, the time it will take the fleet to steam down the Atlantic. My suggestion would be for a small team and me to go to London first, test the waters with Mrs. Thatcher, then proceed on to Buenos Aires, see if we can talk a bit of sense into the junta, get them to walk this kitty back. The Brits' main fear at this point is that we will make them turn their fleet around, with nothing to show for it. The 50th Parallel is the trigger.

U.S. Amb. to the U.N. Jeane Kirkpatrick: I am quite concerned about the Soviet disinformation campaign. Not only the SR-71 falsehood but also the business, equally false, about Uganda using its rotational seat on the Security Council to support British war preparations. Mr. President, I have no doubt whatsoever that this crisis is the gravest foreign policy issue to face you since you became President. Argentina is an all-important partner in hemisphere solidarity. We must settle this. We simply cannot let the UK call the shots.

Inman: I couldn't disagree more strongly with Jeane. For hemisphere solidarity we don't depend on Argentina—we don't owe Argentina a thing!

Kirkpatrick: The question is not Argentina—it's the entire hemisphere, the viability of the Rio Treaty. The point is, we have to settle this.

RR: I'd offer this assessment: I would feel better about Latin America if we retain the friendship of both parties in this crisis, but it is more important to us now that the UK not fail.

Haig: All of this confirms what I've been feeling: we have a window of opportunity now. We will have to apply leverage in both capitals. It'll be a bruising exercise but we need to do it if war is to be averted. Argentina is friendly, and we don't want to alienate its leadership, whose continuing cooperation against Castro and the Sandinistas in Central America is essential. The really key point is to secure, simultaneously, withdrawal of Argentine troops from the Falklands, and getting the fleet to hold. I'll go to London first, meet with Mrs. Thatcher. The UK is an ally, but we need to know their bottom line. We need to sober both sides up.

Clark: What we need now first and foremost is clear communication with all parties."

Switching narrative style, Rentschler continued: "*Starting, maybe, with the Sit Room participants themselves?* Monitoring it all, I nearly missed the morning's most important message, as did most of the principals, including RAWHIDE himself during the oddly festive exit bustle, his ruddy face wreathed in smiling merriment, his spirits visibly high, while bag-toting aides hustled him toward the South Lawn where the noise from whup-a-whup rotary blades of his Marine One chopper loudly whooshed. He couldn't *wait* for that Caribbean idyll to begin! Al Haig, ruddy-faced himself and radiant with fresh confidence, barely had time to murmur sotto-voce in the Presidential ear: 'Don't worry Mr. President, we'll pull this thing off. I'll take Dick Walters with me—he'll talk to those junta generals in Spanish military slang and scare the hell out of 'em.' But the main message, eloquent and compelling, was behind me in the Sit Room, behind everyone else. It came from CIA's Deputy Director, Admiral Bobby Ray Inman. I saw him standing there, slim bespectacled figure, his country boy's impassioned voice directed toward the backs of his fellow principals now bumping each other in their eager rush from the Sit Room:

"I want to reiterate, as emphatically as I can, my opposition to Jeane Kirkpatrick's point of view, it's the most wrongheaded thing I have ever heard! I'm here to say we have no alternative but to back our British allies to the hilt. I'm not evoking just the historic ties of bloodlines, language, law, alliance, culture, and tradition, central as these are. I want you to remember the overwhelming importance of our shared interest in the strategic stakes, the depth and breadth of our intelligence cooperation, the whole gamut of global Cold War concerns we have riding on close interaction with the UK. And I want you to remember the problems we have with Argentina on the nuclear non-proliferation front. If we let the Argentines get away with aggression now using purely conventional stuff, who is to say that in ten or fifteen years down the road they won't be tempted to try it again with nukes?" (Rentschler, *A Reason to Get Up*, pages 632–637)

Secretary of Defense Weinberger also took his own handwritten notes of the April 7 NSPG meeting. In Weinberger's fragmented account, Inman began: "Argentina's getting nervous. [Argentina's] air-lifting troops—fleet." The notes continue:

"CWW [Weinberger]: Military sit[uation]—UK

"Al [Haig]: UK very firm & warlike. Argentine Pres., when RR [Reagan] called, couldn't call [him] back. Al told them we wouldn't get involved[,] [I]f Argentina's got[,] they would never compromise sovereignty. Have they called back & asked Al to come to Buenos Aires. Ready to withdraw forces—cannot [withdraw] admin. [Argentines] Can't take return to prior order. Al suggests he go to London first—& go fast—Argentina's soft & the stronger the UK gets its war fever up.

"RR: When could British fleet get in? & we [volunteer?] to air lift detachment for peacekeeping.

"RR: Could people [illegible] vote on it & choose their own government?

"Haig: [Joint] admin.—with neutral overseers. Is [illegible] an arrangement—UK [?] from Argentines. *Or* UN Trusteeship or O.A.S.

"RR: Must be a solution [illegible] all them.

"Haig: But UK wants to make a show.

"Jeane K[irkpatrick]: Soviets are pumping out disinformation. Latin Americans are lining up behind Argentina. Vital error—whole hemisphere involved. We can't let UK [. . .]

"Inman: Support British.

"CW: Mrs. T [Thatcher] will fall.

"RR: Settle it in a way that doesn't let UK fall. That's [illegible] Argentines to ask them whether this Argentine Gov't *fall*.

"Al: We can settle it—but will have to bruise[?] both capitals. Simultaneous action—withdrawal of troops—while UK fleet holds. So Al should go to London first—even tho[ugh] the UK doesn't want us to.

"J.K. [Kirkpatrick]: *Can be settled*. But should be before fleet crosses 50th Parallel & brings Rio Treaty in.

"RR: Oil rights could be bargaining chip. [Illegible]

"RR: Will send Haig—will go to London & Buenos Aires.

"RR: UK will have to understand threat its" [Weinberger's notes appear to fail to record the remainder of Reagan's statement.]

Weinberger's handwritten notes are in the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Weinberger Papers, Appointment and Diary File, White House and Cabinet Notes Set A, 1981 (1).

The White House issued a statement after the meeting announcing that the President was sending Secretary Haig to London and Buenos

Aires “in the interest of assisting both parties in the search for a peaceful resolution of the dispute in the South Atlantic.” (*Public Papers: Reagan, 1982*, Book I, pages 440–441)