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INTERVIEW OF
SECRETARY OF STATE ALEXANDER M. HAIG, JR.
BY
JOHANNA McGEARY and GREGORY WIERZYNSKI
OF
TIME MAGAZINE
AT
STATE DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON, D. C.
THURSDAY, APRIL 22, 1982, at 5:15 P.M.

MR. WIERZYNSKI: Essentially, a kind of tour d'horizon on the record on the major fronts.

SECRETARY HAIG: All right.

MR. WIERZYNSKI: Could we start off on the Falklands?

SECRETARY HAIG: O.K.

MR. WIERZYNSKI: I don't have any terribly questions since we don't know exactly what is going on. You'll have to tell us what the state of play is, and if you can give us a bit of chronology on this.

SECRETARY HAIG: O.K. Let's keep this off the record, so we just talk about the setting off the record first.

MR. WIERZYNSKI: O.K.

SECRETARY HAIG: It was clear from the outset of the crisis that the United States did not have the luxury of staying aloof, and frankly; it didn't have the tactical luxury of staying aloof until the parties involved became sufficiently seized with the gravity of the positions they were in. It would have either propelled itself into a United Nations situation or an OAS situation, in which it would become a North/South issue, and imperialism/colonialism issue versus the Western industrialized world. In either of those bodies, the outcome would have been clear: Emotion-charged and long-standing issues would have obliterated and perhaps distorted objective observations that the peace was broken by illegal action.

That meant it was clear from the outset that the United States had to take the initiative, and be seen to have that initiative, to prevent these kinds of overviews which would have put not only Western interests in jeopardy, but United States interests, more importantly.

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The stakes in the OAS were clear. There would have been a quick alignment of Spanish-speaking against English-speaking members; and to some extent, the vote last week was the reflection of that. So for those who sit on the sidelines and suggest that we moved too quickly or that we shouldn't have moved the way we did, it is only a reflection of their lack of sensitivity to the strategic realities involved here.

Another aspect of the urgency was to be sure that communication was started in a responsible way between two governments that were profoundly alienated by the act of the Argentine Government -- historic animosity in Argentina, a fragile and non-democratic political system, in which decision-making is not dictatorial, but rather fragmented and vulnerable and subject to a multiplicity of vetoes from any number of interest groups, but with a very strong contemporary control by hard-line, military interests, especially those of the naval service.

MS. McGEARY: Can I just ask you one question right there?

SECRETARY HAIG: Yes.

MS. McGEARY: Has that badly complicated your effort? That is, have you found that there is no one who really can speak with authority for Argentina, and whom you know and can convince the Britons can deliver on whatever he says?

SECRETARY HAIG: That is partially true, but I think what is more significant about the fact is not its impact on negotiations, but on the need to have a substantial third party with integrity involved, because that provides some assurances to both parties, in the case of Britain, that they have someone sharing the burden of the lack of confidence in that structure; and in the case of Argentina, somebody that can blunt (?) where there is a profound alienation after 17 years of frustration in an effort to negotiate a solution, where they have been consistently and regularly "stonewalling."

That "stonewalling," from the Argentine perspective, involves the "cocooning" of the islands, if you will, and the inhabitants of the island in such a way that if self-determination is the criteria, they will inevitably vote for continued allegiance. The Argentines, I think with some justice, can point out that they haven't had a fair chance to offer alternatives to the inhabitants.

From the British point of view, of course, their decolonialization records since the Second War is not one that would

suggest that they have been reactionary or intransigent. They have always, however, agreed to decolonialization on the criteria of the will of the people. Historically, seldom has that involved turning sovereignty from one power to another power. So that is a complex aspect of this problem.

All of these factors made it clear that the United States was going to have to move fast, to take control of a process, to the degree that our involvement constitutes that -- to make every effort we can in an extremely difficult situation.

These are the strategic realities of it, but there are contemporary political realities that involve negotiations and the complexity of them -- that is that both incumbents are in jeopardy, and their management or mis-management of the situation will affect their life expectancy in the very near term. The very near term in the case of Galtieri -- he would probably be out within a week, and be replaced by a more rigid and hard-line leadership, at least in the near term. In the case of Britain, Mrs. Thatcher's government would be hard-pressed to survive the debacle. Debacle for her is a lack of success. A lack of success could be either a conflict which ends up indeterminant in character --

MR. WIERZYNSKI: Yes, she has to win, hasn't she?

SECRETARY HAIG: Right. -- or a lack of conflict, in which the basic principles are compromised in order to stack themselves. That's the setting. In that context, there is very little leeway for concession on either side, because the basic issue is sovereignty, which both historically claim, and the contemporary authority on the Island during a period when the question of sovereignty would be determined.

MS. McGEARY: Is the immediate sovereignty question rather than the ultimate one the thorn in that issue at the moment?

SECRETARY HAIG: No.

MS. McGEARY: That is, this whole business of how do you get from here to a point where you negotiate then, or is the end sovereignty still the most widely --

SECRETARY HAIG: The end sovereignty is the most serious and intractable question.

MS. McGEARY: Because the British insist on self-determination?

SECRETARY HAIG: No. Because the Argentines expect the negotiations to move towards a pre-conceived conclusion. And the British insist that the negotiations should be open-ended and based on the interests and the will of the people -- the inhabitants.

I think it's clear that neither side wants war. There are jingoist influences on both sides, but I don't think they are the dominant popular influence, and that's where we are.

The process, as you know, has been, first, the trip to the first capital, and the very, very lengthy period in Buenos Aires in which definitive positions were presented. The first thing: This is not an American plan; this is not a Haig plan, as CBS and some of the others keep referring to it. It's not that. We are not mediators. All we are doing is offering good offices to help extract and communicate and try to bring the two parties closer together. We are now at the point where the really key issues are all that remain. We're into what I call the real negotiations now.

MR. WIERZYNSKI: What issues are those?

SECRETARY HAIG: They have to deal with the interim arrangements on the Island and the sovereignty issue in the longer term. That's where you are.

MS. McGEARY: From all that we could understand, the proposal that the Argentines gave you when you came back and the one that Pym brought with him today seem to be quite far apart. Is that an accurate perception?

SECRETARY HAIG: No, it's not an accurate perception.

MS. McGEARY: Do you feel a give on either side?

SECRETARY HAIG: They are not far apart. Most of the major differences have been narrowed. What is far apart is the hard core issue; but even there, the language is not far apart.

It's too early to say where we are going to go from here and how, other than that the process has continued, and the intensity of it hasn't let up one bit. It may involve further travel, and it may not.

MS. McGEARY: You wouldn't mind that?

SECRETARY HAIG: I don't think that's the issue. The issue is to do the utmost -- to be perceived to have done the utmost. And if the process collapses, it must be the consequence of unacceptable intransigence on one side or the other, and must be perceived to be that.

MR. WIERZYNSKI: Mr. Secretary, what happens if it comes to some kind of a showdown down there? Militarily, who has got the better of that argument?

SECRETARY HAIG: In a court of law, there is no question but that U.N. Resolution 502, which we supported, has condemned aggression.

MR. WIERZYNSKI: But who is stronger militarily?

SECRETARY HAIG: Oh, who is stronger militarily?

MR. WIERZYNSKI: Yes.

SECRETARY HAIG: Well, that depends a great deal on British strategy. The Argentine Government is in somewhat of an economic crisis. The economic community has taken unified and rigorous sanctions that represent what are roughly a third of the balance of payments of the Argentine Government; and if the United States were ever to join those sanctions, it would be a substantial blow. Beyond that, there are credit problems. The Argentine Government, which has been already in an economic crisis, with runaway, triple-digit inflation, is extremely vulnerable in the longer term to unified Western industrialized sanctions. So there's a vulnerability.

In the military sense, it is clear that the British forces should have the ability to isolate and seal the Falklands to prevent their resupply, and if there were as a provocative action taken by Argentine forces against such a seal, to then take very, very substantial steps, in a maritime sense, against the mainland, through mining:oir --

MR. WIERZYNSKI: To mine their harbors?

SECRETARY HAIG: Right. You know most of their commerce moves through that river and into the Atlantic. That doesn't mean that Argentina itself does not have sustaining capability for a substantial period. They are a country that is used to living in chaos. They are incredibly rich and well endowed. I would anticipate support from sympathetic Latin American countries, so you can have a prolonged, intractable, and highly debilitating military crisis.

MR. WIERZYNSKI: Is there a point in this whole crisis at which the United States declares itself on the side of Britain?

SECRETARY HAIG: The United States has had the honourous task of trying to maintain a credibility in both capitals. That does not suggest for a moment that should the negotiations collapse, that the United States will not move in the direction of its traditional historic ally. It's going to have to, and it will.

The point should be made that the British Government wanted our help, they asked for our help in the first place -- as did the Argentine Government. We've tried to maintain a reasonably balanced position within the context of our existing relationships; and that already has its large tilt towards Great Britain, in practical terms, through historic collaboration in a number of areas. We have not added to that simply because we think it would discredit our ability to function. But if the peace talks collapse, there is no doubt about where the United States is going to stand.

MS. McGEARY: Have the British made it clear to us what form they would expect that support to take?

SECRETARY HAIG: Not really. It doesn't take much imagination. We know what it would take, and they know we know. It doesn't mean military action, if that's what you're hinting.

MS. McGEARY: No, no, I wasn't actually thinking of that.

MR. WIERZYNSKI: Have the Argentinians made requests? In your statement last week where you said you would not go beyond existing arrangements -- and I forget what phrase you used, but it implied that both countries, or one or the other anyway, had asked for a specific --

SECRETARY HAIG: That's too sensitive a question. Needless to say, that was a very carefully crafted statement, and said what it meant.

MS. McGEARY: Can we just close this with a sort of standard question of the moment? Are you optimistic or pessimistic? How long, even, do you think negotiations keep going on?

SECRETARY HAIG: Not much longer. We are in the final stages. I say now we are at the hard points. The negotiations are really serious at this point, and the time available is rather limited.

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MR. WIERZYNSKI: What determines the time available, the arrival of the fleet there?

SECRETARY HAIG: Of course. You don't think that fleet can arrive there, and then steam around and do nothing! There would be no credibility left.

MR. WIERZYNSKI: They'd have to do something then.

SECRETARY HAIG: Right. When they get there, they're going to act if there hasn't been a settlement.

MR. WIERZYNSKI: When do you expect them to be down there?

SECRETARY HAIG: In a week or so. There are some that are there now.

MS. McGEARY: But there is still almost a week before the main force --

MR. WIERZYNSKI: South Georgia Island.

SECRETARY HAIG: For the main forces. That doesn't mean that we have that much time. We don't engage in consultations with the British on what they are going to do or when or how. It is not our right to do it, and we don't intend to do it. They do know that we want to continue the effort towards peace.

MS. McGEARY: You'll met with Costa Mendez this weekend?

SECRETARY HAIG: Yes.

MS. McGEARY: Do both Britain and Argentina sort of look at this as the sort of presentation of their last position, that they will talk with you, and this is --

SECRETARY HAIG: No, no, I don't think -- That's not why Costa Mendez is here.

MS. McGEARY: I understand that.

SECRETARY HAIG: Costa Mendez is here to go to the OAS, and I'm not so sure that he is necessarily properly endowed to conduct those negotiations. I just say that again. Now, this is all DEEP, DEEP BACKGROUND, and you've just got to speculate. I mean OFF THE RECORD.

MR. FISCHER: Meaning they can write it without any names. You write it as though you know it.

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Ms. McGEARY: As though you know it.

SECRETARY HAIG: As though you know it. No officials, no State Department officials, or White House officials.

MR. FISCHER: It's got to be that way.

MS. McGEARY: No high-ranking official from the seventh floor! (Laughter)

MR. WIERZYNSKI: Mr. Secretary, just to turn a page here, is there a way that you could describe for us on the record the stakes, what is at stake here for the United States in this conflict? Do you call that extraordinary danger or use a rather heavy phrase to describe the importance of this conflict?

What American interests are involved in the Falklands?

SECRETARY HAIG: There are a host of inter-related issues involved. There are basic issues of international law and their relationship with the fundamental objective of this Administration's foreign policy, and that is to insist that historic change occur through the accepted rules of law. So that's a stake of principle.

Secondly, there are hemispheric interests. Clearly, at a time, a very important time, when we have been working intensely to enhance our relationship with the OAS and the Member States of the OAS -- and with considerable success as recently manifested in the Salvadoran/Nicaraguan cases, the kind of unity we have maintained and the support for the policies that we have been pursuing. That is all at stake in this issue.

Then, there are what I call Atlantic Community or alliance interests. One need only reflect back on the experiences of the Suez, which has some parallels in this instance. An American misstep could have lasting consequences. Then, there are North/South overtones, of the kind I spoke to you of. And I think it would be a tragic outcome if this issue were to deteriorate into that highly-charged and emotional context.

Finally of course, there are East/West overtones. It is the proclivity of the Soviet Union to fish in troubled waters. It has been evident in the recent past, and there is no reason to anticipate it would be any different in this situation.

MR. WIERZYNSKI: O.K.

MS. McGEARY: Let's move to the Middle East?

Remainder of interview omitted (deals with non-Falklands issues).