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DEFENCE AND OVERSEA POLICY (OFFICIAL) COMMITTEE

SUB-COMMITTEE ON THE SOUTH ATLANTIC AND THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

BRITISH COMMUNITY IN ARGENTINA

Note by the Secretaries

The attached Note by Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials, which considers the situation that would face the British community in Argentina in the event of hostilities, or a declaration of war by the Argentines, is circulated for the Sub-Committee's information. The Note describes the action already taken (paragraphs 8-11) and the steps which would be required (paragraphs 12-18) if substantial numbers of British passport holders wished to leave Argentina promptly. Further action as appropriate will be taken under the direction of Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers.

Signed C H O'D ALEXANDER
G R G MIDDLETON
S D SPIVEY

Cabinet Office
15 April 1982

BRITISH COMMUNITY IN ARGENTINA : EVACUATION

(Note by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office)

1. This paper considers the situation facing the British community in Argentina in the event of hostilities with Argentina breaking out or a declaration of war. In either event the exodus of British subjects from Argentina would increase and might be accompanied by action by the Argentine authorities to expel some of them. There are at present no plans to expel Argentines from this country, except possibly in retaliation for their expelling our own people.

BACKGROUND

2. The total number of Anglo-Argentines is estimated to be 100,000. These are people of British descent who are settled in Argentina, the large majority having Argentine citizenship and having no formal and legal connection with Britain. As Argentine citizens long settled in that country and subject to conscription in the Argentine forces they should be regarded as fully-fledged Argentines without any formal connections with this country. A proportion of these will, however, be dual nationals in that they may also carry British passports.

3. The Embassy has estimated the total community holding only British passports is about 17,000. Many of these are also long settled in Argentina and in normal circumstances would regard themselves as much Argentine as British. In present conditions short of hostilities these would probably wish to keep their heads down. However, there are about 7,500 who are short term expatriate residents and the Embassy estimates that this group will be keen to get away, at least temporarily.

4. The 17,000 British subjects are scattered throughout the country, with concentrations in the greater Buenos Aires area. Short-term expatriate British subjects are also scattered throughout the country and many of them are in Patagonia where they work for oil companies.

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5. At least 17,000 British subjects are thus at risk if hostilities or war with Argentina should break out. We believe that those British subjects who have been resident in Argentina for a long time have connections with other South American countries, especially Uruguay, and if they were to make their way to such countries many would not wish to be repatriated to this country. Under present Argentine regulations, long-term residents could travel to neighbouring countries without an exit permit by using their identity cards.

6. Short-term expatriates who fall within the total of 17,000 and who number about 7,500 would for the most part wish to return to this country, although their companies could post some of them to other countries.

7. A problem could arise if the Argentinians were to ^{completely} freeze the bank accounts of British companies or individuals. If this were to happen British subjects could find themselves without funds to leave the country.

ACTION SO FAR TAKEN

8. British subjects in Argentina have been advised by the World Service of the BBC to leave Argentina by means of normal commercial transport and that advice could be obtained from the British Interests Section of the Swiss Embassy in Buenos Aires. We have had no reports from posts of the numbers who have in fact left. The BBC World Service have agreed to continue to send messages on our behalf.

9. We have established from neighbouring posts in Chile, Brazil and Uruguay that there is considerable surplus capacity on the airlines serving Europe from those countries. In the case of Brazil, Peru and Chile these airlines include British Caledonian.

10. In the case of Uruguay we understand that the Uruguayan authorities would permit charter flights if they became necessary. British Caledonian, who were prepared to lay on a charter flight on 9 April (which was cancelled for lack of demand) have told

us that they have wide-bodied aircraft, each of which could hold 247 people, available. Cost per aircraft would be £126,000 and if costs are recovered from passengers the cost per head would be rather less than scheduled flights. In the absence of any demand we have not so far activated any charters but could do so, we are told by British Caledonian, at short notice.

11. In anticipation of the freezing of bank accounts by the Argentine authorities we have transferred through the Swiss Embassy in London to the British Interests Section of the Swiss Embassy in Buenos Aires a sum of £50,000 which can be made available not only to those whose financial resources have been frozen, but to Distressed British Subjects. We could, if necessary, transfer further sums at short notice and have asked the post to keep us informed.

THE FUTURE

12. If hostilities with Argentina were to break out, or there were a declaration of war, we might need to get in touch quickly with posts in neighbouring countries asking them to arrange charters of non-British airlines to run flights from Argentina, largely Buenos Aires. We have already had approaches from a local company offering this service. We shall keep it in reserve. If this step became necessary we should need to arrange quickly for fairly large amounts of money to be transferred to our posts. The most likely posts for this would be Montevideo and Rio de Janeiro. There may be problems with Chile, e.g. reports of closing the Argentine/Chilean border.

13. Should Argentina invoke the Rio Treaty, the possibility should not be excluded that the ^{movement} number of British subjects from Argentina to neighbouring countries might be affected.

14. Until 2 April the only British airline serving Argentina was British Caledonia. This service ended on 2 April when British Caledonian decided that the risk was too high.

15. Argentina is also well served by airlines and many British subjects should be able to make their way to other countries by

this means, making use, if necessary, of finance we have provided. Land communications with neighbouring countries are also good, and there are connections by sea. In the event of hostilities or war breaking out, we should need to supply funds to our posts on a fairly large scale. On past experience this could be done quickly. We might also need to reinforce the Consular Sections of posts and with these contingencies in mind we have already supplied an additional Consular Officer to Montevideo.

16. If large numbers of British subjects should arrive in neighbouring countries we should need to arrange quickly with carriers for either an increase in their scheduled services or charters to bring those who wish to to this country. Our strong preference should be to use British carriers, and as the British airline with experience in this area and with surplus aircraft, our preference would be to use British Caledonian as far as possible. British Caledonian have confirmed to us that they have surplus aircraft and would make them available. The operation could develop to a scale where other British, and possibly foreign airlines, might need to be involved.

17. On technical, political and economic grounds, the use of military aircraft is not envisaged.

18. The Home Office expect that British passport holders reaching this country from Argentina will be admitted with leave to stay for twelve months initially. Most will have relatives or friends with whom they could stay, but there are contingent Home Office plans to provide accommodation in camps for those who need it.