

22. Message From British Foreign Secretary Carrington to Secretary of State Haig¹

March 28, 1982

Your Charge d'Affaires in London will have reported to you² the serious situation which has developed between ourselves and the Argentine Government following the illegal landing at Leith Harbour on the British island of South Georgia last week of a party of Argentines. The Argentines have a long-standing claim to the Falkland Islands and their dependencies and, despite all our efforts to resolve the dispute by peaceful negotiation, the Argentines have recently been making it clear that they are prepared to use other means to achieve their aim of a full transfer of sovereignty. The whole question of the Falklands is a very sensitive one for us, our public opinion and our Parliament.

As soon as we discovered the presence of the party, we sought to persuade the Argentine Government through diplomatic channels to remove them. But they have refused to do this. Instead they appear to have consolidated the party's position by landing further equipment and have issued a statement that the men on South Georgia will be given all necessary protection. I have moreover, just received an uncompromising and negative message from the Argentine Foreign Minister about the problem. It offers no constructive suggestions and seems likely only to aggravate the problem.

The Royal Navy Ice Patrol Ship, HMS *Endurance*, is anchored nearby in Grytveken Harbour. A number of Argentine Navy vessels are heading for the area and we cannot exclude the possibility that, if we attempt to remove the men ourselves, they may retaliate.

It is our firm wish to resolve this problem peacefully. To that end, we have done everything we can to persuade the Argentines to find a way out: we are prepared to examine every avenue with them. But the continued presence of these men is an infringement of British sovereignty and you will understand that we cannot acquiesce in that.

I appreciate that this dispute will seem to others a bilateral matter from the British and Argentine Governments. But despite all my Government's efforts to find an acceptable solution, we have now reached

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, P820054-0571. Confidential. Printed from an unsigned copy. Sent to Haig under a March 28 cover letter from Henderson. According to Haig's memoirs, Henderson personally delivered the message the same day. (Haig, *Caveat*, p. 261) The Department transmitted the text of the message to the Embassy in Buenos Aires in telegram 83326, March 29. (Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, D820165-1097)

² See Document 17.

a stage where the situation will soon become very difficult. I do not, however, believe that it is in anyone's interests to allow this incident to be the cause of what may become armed conflict in the South Atlantic, and I wish to explore every possible avenue which might help us to avoid this.

I should accordingly be grateful if you would consider taking the matter up with the Argentines, stressing the need to defuse the situation and find a solution we can all accept. If the Argentines maintain that they will not remove the men themselves and that they will resist any attempt by us to do so, the use of a third country ship might be a compromise they could accept. The problem could also be resolved by the Argentines agreeing that their men should seek the necessary permission from the British authorities at Grytveken in order to regularise their presence.

I should be very grateful for any help you can give us on this. If we do not find a solution soon, I fear the gravest consequences.