



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

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A J Coles Esq
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N. S. J. R.

M. S. E.

Dear Sir,

THE FALKLANDS: NAVAL DEPLOYMENTS IN NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1977

1. We have been researching this subject. There are still papers to study before our conclusions can be definitive. But the work so far has established the important features of the 1977 story.
2. As early as February 1977 there was an intelligence assessment that Argentine military action was possible if talks with Britain went badly. The Minister of State at the FCO (Mr Rowlands) held talks late that month in Buenos Aires about the Falklands. No naval deployments appear to have been undertaken at that time.
3. On 1 November 1977, it was assessed, on the basis of all the evidence available rather than as a result of a particular insight from intelligence sources, that Argentina would still prefer to achieve its sovereignty objectives by peaceful means, but that if negotiations broke down, or the Argentines concluded that they would not make progress, there would be a high risk of their resorting to more forceful measures, including direct military action. It was assessed that invasion of the Falklands could not be discounted but was unlikely. Action against British shipping in disputed waters was considered the most serious risk. The establishment of a presence on one or more of the dependencies or harassment of the British Antarctic Survey base on South Georgia were viewed as possibilities.
4. Mr Rowlands was due to hold further negotiations with the Argentines in New York on 13-15 December 1977. The Government decided in November to send an SSN and two frigates to the South Atlantic. They left in the period 24-26 November. HMS Endurance made a routine visit to Port Stanley from 13 December. But the other ships' movements were secret. The two frigates and the Royal Fleet Auxiliaries stayed 1,000 miles north-east of the Falklands. The nuclear-powered submarine moved into the immediate vicinity of the Islands but remained submerged.



5. The talks in mid-December went well. The government then decided before Christmas that the RN ships should leave the area but that secrecy should be maintained.

6. This naval deployment did not become public and Parliament was not informed. There is no evidence in the more important files, which have already been reviewed, that the Argentines knew of its deployment. It seems unlikely therefore to have influenced their actions in November-December 1977.

7. We shall write again if further research alters or amplifies this story in any significant way.

Tausner,

Andrew

R A Burns
Private Secretary to the
Permanent Under Secretary

cc: D J Wright Esq
CABINET OFFICE