

**118. Information Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Enders) to Secretary of State Haig<sup>1</sup>**

Washington, April 14, 1982

SUBJECT

Political Implications of Argentine Military Activity in the Antarctic

*The British Embassy asked us April 8 (Tab 1)<sup>2</sup> to seek assurances from Argentina that it would take no action against British scientific stations*

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, P880104-0970. Secret. Drafted by Jones and G. McCulloch (ARA/RPP); cleared by M. McLeod (L/OES), Alberti, J.P.A. Bernhardt (OES/OPA), D. Jones (FWG), Monroe, and McNutt. Jones initialed for all clearing officials; McCulloch did not initial. Haig initialed the upper right-hand corner of the first page and underneath this wrote "agree."

<sup>2</sup> At Tab 1, but not printed, is telegram Tosec 50082/96333, April 10, in which the Department transmitted the text of the British Embassy request to Haig in London. (Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, P880104-0973)

*in Antarctica*. A legal analysis sent you on April 10 (Tab 2)<sup>3</sup> concluded that *any military activity* not in self-defense, south of 60 degrees south latitude, including exercises, *would violate the Antarctic Treaty*.

A recent CIA study argued that, "Perhaps more than any other country, Argentina is likely to abrogate the Treaty if its primacy in its claim area is threatened. For example, if another country began a significant unilateral exploration or exploitation effort in the Argentina claim, Argentina might well react with military force even though the Treaty forbids it. *All but one of Argentina's eight permanent stations are run by the military,*" and *it has an all-weather airstrip capable of handling C-130's.* (Tab 3)<sup>4</sup> All of the Argentine territorial claim lies within the British territorial claim, and all the British research stations are within the Argentine claim. In addition, the Argentine and British claims overlap with that of Chile and contain research stations operated by Poland, the USSR and the U.S. Brazil has proclaimed a "zone of interest" within the Argentine claimed area.

[1 paragraph (3 lines) not declassified]

[2 lines not declassified] *We believe that Argentina is most unlikely to initiate hostilities as long as the U.K. does not. In the event of military or naval conflict in the Falklands area, further Argentine action against British interests in Argentina is likely. Likewise, the chance of some action in the Antarctic would increase. Even in those circumstances, we would not rate the chances as higher than one in ten, unless Argentina suffered major naval losses and casualties that drove it to seek any available opportunity for striking back.*

The factors restraining Argentine action are:

—An attack in the Antarctic would be strongly opposed by the 24 other parties to the Antarctic Treaty. We would expect it to be as disturbing to the USSR as to the others;

—*Seizure of the British stations would give Argentina no military advantage and under Article IV of the Treaty would neither advance nor consolidate its Antarctic claim, which already encompasses most of the British claim. The British claim does not stem from or depend upon its title to the Falklands, and the other Treaty parties would strongly resist any effort to change the present status of territorial claims;*

—*An attack on unarmed scientists would be far more widely condemned in the international community than was the attack on the Falklands;*

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<sup>3</sup> At Tab 2, not printed, is telegram Tosec 50097/96817, April 10, in which the Department transmitted to Haig in Buenos Aires the text of an information memorandum analyzing the implications of Argentine action against U.K. research stations in the context of the Antarctic Treaty. (Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, P880104-0974)

<sup>4</sup> At Tab 3, not printed, is an excerpt from a June 1981 CIA study of the Argentine position on Antarctica. (Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, P880104-0975)

—By undermining, if not destroying, the Treaty, Argentina would sacrifice a regime it helped negotiate, in which it has participated for 21 years, and which is working out rules for fish and mineral resource exploitation more beneficial to Treaty participants than any likely alternative regime. In particular, Argentina has an interest in continuing to exclude the Antarctic Treaty area from the draft Law of the Sea convention.

However unlikely it may be, an Argentine attack in the Antarctic would be highly detrimental to U.S. interest in preservation of the Treaty regime. *Should any such action become more likely, we will certainly wish to express our concern in the strongest terms in Buenos Aires.*