

186. Intelligence Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency¹

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Washington, April 1982

UK-Falklands: Pressures on Thatcher *[portion marking not declassified]*

Summary

The Argentine seizure of the Falkland Islands is seen throughout the United Kingdom as an affront to British sovereignty and national pride that cannot go unanswered. Therefore, despite initial criticism that government negligence allowed the dispute to reach this point, most of Parliament, the media, and the public reacted by enthusiastically supporting the government's determination to use force if a settlement could not be negotiated.

As the Argentines reinforced the islands and the British fleet steamed south, however, the potential for a disaster reminiscent of Suez and for major loss of life began to sink in. Criticism became more pronounced and cracks began to appear in the government's seemingly solid support. The Tory right wing warned Thatcher not to make too many concessions in pursuing a negotiated settlement, while the opposition cautioned her against military action if any hope for a peaceful solution remained. Public opinion, although split, seemed to favor a tough response as long as the risks were minimal. Opposition leaders and some influential voices in the media began to question fundamental

¹ Source: Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Support Services (DI), Job 83B00228R: Production Case Files (1982), Box 1, Folder 16: UK-Falklands: Pressures on Thatcher. Secret; *[handling restriction not declassified]*. The memorandum was prepared in the Office of European Analysis in the Directorate of Intelligence based upon information available as of April 28.

British positions, in particular whether it was necessary to restore British administration to the Falklands or to guarantee self-determination for the islanders.

Since the successful retaking of South Georgia Island earlier this week, criticism within the Conservative Party has died down and public opinion seems to have swung once again solidly behind Thatcher. The South Georgia operation, however, has made the opposition parties even more nervous about military operations than they were earlier, and the Labor Party in particular is pushing hard for continuing negotiations. Despite opposition nervousness, Thatcher will pursue the military options she believes needed to restore the Falklands to British rule as quickly as possible as long as she has the support of the Conservative Party and the public. In the absence of a sudden diplomatic breakthrough, therefore, the United Kingdom is likely to pursue military action beyond the blockade as soon as technically feasible.

If the extended blockade and related military actions do not produce results very soon or if they lead to heavy British casualties, criticism will rise within the Conservative Party, public support will plummet, and the government's survival will come increasingly into question.

[less than 1 line not declassified]

[Omitted here is the body of the memorandum.]