

419. Telegram From the Embassy in Argentina to the Department of State¹

Buenos Aires, January 12, 1983, 1555Z

239. Subject: Argentine Intentions: Military Actions Concerning the Falklands. Ref: FBIS DTG 102140Z Jan 83.²

1. S—Entire text.

2. Taking into account recent intelligence reports and statements of Argentine officials, the Embassy Intelligence Committee reviewed current Argentine capabilities, intentions and views on potential US position. We conclude:

A. There are sufficient indications that some Argentine military move could possibly be afoot to merit concern and increased intelli-

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, D830020-0706. Secret. Sent for information to London, USUN, CINCLANT, and USCINCSOUTH.

² ² Not found.

gence activity.³ Presumably whatever action might be intended would be directed against the British in the South Atlantic, although some kind of scheme for confronting the Chileans is not completely inconceivable.

B. Argentina does not have the military capability to mount a large-scale invasion of the Falklands in the near future. Those in the armed services who are thinking rationally know that the equipment and joint operations capability for such an undertaking are lacking. In our view statements about retaking the Islands have a longer-term perspective, are designed to build military and civilian morale, as well as to justify arms purchases and to pressure the British to negotiate.

C. Any of the services has the capability of provoking or creating an [garble—incident?] involving force. Destroying a British helicopter outside the 150-mile limit has been mentioned by some officers. A commando landing or sapper attack against British aircraft are examples of other conceivable possibilities. The rationale would be to pressure the British to negotiate while—most important—restoring the honor and domestic reputation of the armed forces. While it would be normal for the Argentine military to be planning, training and practicing for various possible contingency operations against the Malvinas, such activities do not necessarily mean that any operational or political decisions have been made. But, given what is seen here as highly provocative action by the British⁴ and given potential domestic considerations which could place the military under great pressure, it is conceivable that the Junta or some part of the armed forces would decide to go ahead with some kind of military operation such as those mentioned above.

D. Despite repeated statements here and in Washington of the US position opposing the use of force, many in the government and the military may believe that US would not react adversely to a small

³ Among the reports of possible Argentine military activity against U.K. targets include a December 23, 1982, report that asserted that “those members of the naval staff involved in the planning of the Argentine invasion of the Falklands in April were all back in Buenos Aires and engaged in planning further action against the islands.” (White House Situation Room Note, January 5; Reagan Library, White House Situation Room Files, Series III: Notes, Notes 01/07/1983–01/12/1983) A December 28 report prepared in the CIA indicated evidence of secret training of underwater demolition teams involving “infiltration by submarine to place explosives on aircraft and buildings.” (Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Security, Job 95B00915R: Leak Data Base Files (1976–1991), Box 5, Folder 14: Leak Investigation Chrono—January–May 1983) A January 10 White House Situation Room Note conveyed a British report that stated that the “Argentine armed forces were actively preparing for a renewal of hostilities,” were “re-equipping for this purpose,” and were practicing air attacks in the Andean foothills “against targets similar to those on the islands.” (Reagan Library, White House Situation Room Files, Series III: Notes, Notes 01/07/1983–01/12/1983)

⁴ Presumably a reference to Thatcher’s January 9–13 visit to the Falklands/Malvinas during which she toured the sites of battles and honored the U.K. war dead.

action, given what they see as the British provocation and a strong US desire to strengthen Latin American ties.

3. We shall take every opportunity here with both military and civilians to disabuse any of the notion that our strong views against the use of force have changed. We shall also intensify our efforts to develop additional intelligence.

Shlaudeman