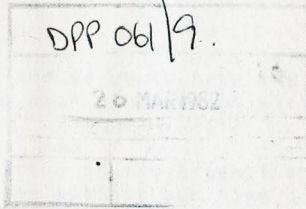


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SECRET

26

THE ORIGINAL HAS BEEN RETAINED
IN THE DEPARTMENT UNDER
SECTION 3 (4) OF THE
PUBLIC RECORDS ACT 1958



re file on

*11/4
26/3*

SOUTH GEORGIA: ASSESSMENT

A 1. If Endurance takes the men off, there is a real risk of:

- (a) confrontation with Argentine warships already sent to area, either at Leith or during return journey to Port Stanley;
- (b) an Argentine military rescue operation to move the men from Port Stanley;
- (c) an Argentine military operation to remove BAS staff from Grytviken.

2. In any such eventuality HMS Endurance has insufficient defence capability; and in any case such a confrontation would escalate.

3. MOD officials have made an urgent assessment of the defence implications. They accept the options (a) to (c) above and conclusion in 2. above.

[REDACTED]
that a task force of two Argentine destroyers and a tanker are being prepared for deployment; and that two heavily-armed corvettes (able to out-gun HMS Endurance) are already at sea to keep watch on HMS Endurance. HMS Endurance can only remain on station at Leith for a further 14 days. A task force to reinforce our capability would take 16 days from sailing from the UK. Whatever task force was sent, it was unlikely that we could establish naval superiority. An urgent decision is therefore required on whether an RFA should be deployed to maintain HMS Endurance.

4. We have therefore to pursue a solution to this problem through diplomatic action. MOD concur. This is what we are now doing.

B If the Argentines refuse to take early action to take the men off, we have the following options:

- (a) to send HMS Endurance in to do the job and to face the probable consequences, in the hope that the Argentines will choose not to force the issue. But this may be a faint hope; and with only HMS Endurance and the Marine garrison in the area, we would remain open either at Grytviken or in the Falklands to subsequent Argentine counter-action;
- (b) to keep HMS Endurance standing by at Grytviken while a task force is mobilised, using the threat of a full-scale military response as continuing pressure on the Argentine Government to find another exit; but our

/bluff

bluff could be called and we would have the greatest difficulty in handling such a situation with the press and Parliament;

- (c) to regularise the position of the Argentine personnel in Leith. This would be against our firm commitment in Parliament to arrange for the men's removal and would create another Southern Thule situation.