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FALKLAND ISLANDS

THE ARGENTINE INVASION OF THE FALKLANDS IS THE LEAD STORY IN BOTH THE NEW YORK TIMES AND WASHINGTON POST OF 3 APRIL. THE POST'S STORY IS HEADED: ARGENTINA SEIZES BRITISH COLONY: PLEA BY REAGAN IGNORED.

2. THE NEW YORK TIMES CARRIES AN EXCELLENT EDITORIAL. FOLLOWING IS TEXT:

BEGINS

BRUTE FORCE IN THE FALKLANDS

THE FALKLAND ISLANDS, A CLUSTER OF ROCKY OUTPOSTS IN THE FAR SOUTH ATLANTIC, ARE PEOPLED MAINLY BY SHEPHERDS OF BRITISH DESCENT. THE ISLANDS ARE ALSO A CONVENIENT STAGING POINT FOR ANTARCTIC EXPLORERS. THEIR PERMANENT POPULATION NUMBERS ONLY IN THE HUNDREDS, BUT YESTERDAY THEY WERE OVERWHELMED BY THOUSANDS OF ARGENTINE TROOPS.

THE COMIC-OPERA ASPECTS OF THE EVENT OUGHT NOT TO OBSCURE THE ESSENTIAL POINT: ARGENTINA HAS A HISTORIC CLAIM TO THE TERRITORY, BUT NO CLAIM AT ALL TO THE LOYALTIES OF ITS INHABITANTS.

IN THE LATE 18TH CENTURY THE ISLANDS, WITH ENGLISH, FRENCH AND SPANISH SETTLERS, CAME UNDER THE SPANISH FLAG. WHEN ARGENTINA BECAME INDEPENDENT DECADES LATER IT CLAIMED SOVEREIGNTY, BUT COULD NOT MAKE ITS CLAIMS STICK. FOR NEARLY 150 YEARS THE ISLANDS HAVE BEEN ADMINISTERED BY BRITAIN. IN RECENT YEARS LONDON AND BUENOS AIRES HAVE NEGOTIATED, WITH ARGENTINA REPEATEDLY THREATENING FORCE.

TWO RECENT DEVELOPMENTS APPEAR FINALLY TO HAVE BROKEN THE STALEMATE. BRITAIN ANNOUNCED NAVAL BUDGET CUTS THAT SUGGESTED A WEAKENING OF ITS CAPACITY TO DEFEND THE FALKLANDS. AND THIS WEEK, ARGENTINA'S MILITARY REGIME WAS STUNNED BY NEW OUTBURSTS OF POLITICAL DISCONTENT.

STORMING ONTO THE VIRTUALLY DEFENSELESS FALKLANDS GIVES THE RULING GENERALS AND ADMIRALS IN BUENOS AIRES A CHANCE TO DIVERT ATTENTION FROM DOMESTIC FAILURES AND RALLY PATRIOTIC PRIDE. IF BRITAIN WERE TO ACCEDE TO THE TAKEOVER, THE REGIME COULD CLAIM CREDIT FOR HUMILIATING A ONCE-POTENT NATIONAL FOE. BUT WITH A CLASH LIKELY, A NEW CRACKDOWN ON DOMESTIC DISSENT BECOMES EASIER TO JUSTIFY.

EVEN THOUGH WASHINGTON IS ON FRIENDLY TERMS WITH BOTH GOVERNMENTS, IT HAS NO CHOICE BUT TO DENOUNCE ARGENTINA'S AGGRESSION. BEYOND THAT, THE ADMINISTRATION WILL HAVE TO THINK SERIOUSLY ABOUT ITS RELATIONS WITH A REGIME THAT, FOR ALL ITS VERBAL TIRADES AGAINST COMMUNISM, PROVIDES GRAIN AND COMFORT TO THE SOVIET UNION, BUT MAINLY HUMAN RIGHTS EMBARRASMENTS AND MILITARY AFFRONTS TO ITS WESTERN FRIENDS.

ENDS

HENDERSON

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FALKLAND ISLANDS

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