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GRS 504

SECRET

DESKBY 251900Z

FM FCO 251500Z MARCH 82

TO IMMEDIATE WASHINGTON

TELEGRAM NUMBER 569 OF 25 MARCH

MIPT: ILLEGAL LANDING ON SOUTH GEORGIA

1. THE COMMANDER OF THE BRITISH ANTARCTIC SURVEY BASE AT GRYTVIKEN ON SOUTH GEORGIA REPORTED ON 19 MARCH THAT AN ARGENTINE NAVY CARGO VESSEL WAS ANCHORED IN NEARBY LEITH HARBOUR AND THAT A LARGE PARTY OF ARGENTINES WERE SETTING UP CAMP. THE ARGENTINE FLAG HAD BEEN HOISTED. THE BASE COMMANDER TOLD THE MEN THEY HAD NO RIGHT TO LAND ON SOUTH GEORGIA WITHOUT SEEKING PERMISSION FROM THE BRITISH AUTHORITIES AND ORDERED THEM EITHER TO SEEK THE NECESSARY CLEARANCE OR TO LEAVE. WE SOUGHT IMMEDIATE CLARIFICATION FROM THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT, BOTH IN BUENOS AIRES AND LONDON, MAKING CLEAR THAT WE REGARDED THIS AS A POTENTIALLY SERIOUS INCIDENT AND ASKING THE ARGENTINES TO ARRANGE FOR THE IMMEDIATE DEPARTURE OF THE SHIP AND PARTY. HMS ENDURANCE, OUR ANTARCTIC ICE-PATROL VESSEL, WAS ORDERED INTO THE AREA.

2. THE ARGENTINE SHIP AND MOST OF THE PARTY LEFT ON 21 MARCH. BUT ABOUT TEN ARGENTINES REMAINED. THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT, WHO CLAIMED TO HAVE HAD NO PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OF THE LANDING, ASSURED US THAT NO SERVING MILITARY PERSONNEL WERE INVOLVED: THE MEN WERE WORKING FOR A COMMERCIAL COMPANY WHICH HAS A CONTRACT TO REMOVE EQUIPMENT FROM DISUSED WHALING STATIONS ON SOUTH GEORGIA. IT WAS HOWEVER UNREASONABLE TO EXPECT ARGENTINES TO SEEK OUR AUTHORISATION FOR THEIR PRESENCE ON TERRITORY CLAIMED BY ARGENTINA.

3. WE MADE CLEAR TO THE ARGENTINES THAT WE COULD NOT ALLOW

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EVEN THE NOW SMALL NUMBER OF MEN TO REMAIN AND TOLD THEM THAT HMS ENDURANCE WAS UNDER WAY TO THE AREA WITH INSTRUCTIONS TO TAKE THE MEN ON BOARD, WITHOUT USING FORCE, AND RETURN THEM TO ARGENTINA VIA PORT STANLEY. THE ARGENTINES REPLIED THAT THEY WOULD REGARD THIS AS GRAVELY PROVOCATIVE. WE ASSURED THEM IN TURN THAT WE WISHED IF AT ALL POSSIBLE TO PREVENT ANY ESCALATION OF THIS INCIDENT, BUT THAT THE MEN HAD TO BE REMOVED SOON. IF THE ARGENTINES COULD DEVISE A METHOD OF DOING SO, WE WOULD BE PREPARED TO PERMIT IT. IF NOT, THE CAPTAIN OF HMS ENDURANCE WOULD HAVE TO CARRY OUT HIS INSTRUCTIONS.

4. WE HAVE SET NO DEADLINES, BUT UNLESS THERE IS EARLY ACTION WE SHALL COME UNDER INCREASING PRESSURE HERE, WHERE THERE HAS BEEN INTENSE PUBLIC AND PARLIAMENTARY INTEREST, TO ORDER HMS ENDURANCE IN.

5. WE ARE UNDER NO ILLUSIONS ABOUT THE POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF TAKING THIS ACTION. REPORTS FROM SECRET SOURCES INDICATE THAT THE ARGENTINE NAVY MAY SEEK TO CONFRONT HMS ENDURANCE IN THE PERFORMANCE OF HER TASK. HMS ENDURANCE IS ONLY LIGHTLY ARMED AND WOULD BE NO MATCH FOR ARGENTINE WARSHIPS. THERE WOULD ALSO BE A GRAVE DANGER OF ANY CONFLICT SPREADING MORE WIDELY: AND ACTION AGAINST THE FALKLANDS THEMSELVES COULD NOT BE EXCLUDED.

6. WE ARE DOING EVERYTHING WE CAN TO DEFUSE THIS POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS SITUATION AND HAVE GIVEN THE ARGENTINES EVERY POSSIBLE LATITUDE FOR FINDING AN EXIT, BUT IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS WE CANNOT ACQUIESCE IN THIS INFRINGEMENT OF BRITISH SOVEREIGNTY AND WE ARE BOUND TO TAKE ACTION TO RESTORE THE STATUS QUO.

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ADDITIONAL DISTN.
FALKLAND ISLANDS

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FALKLAND ISLANDS

* ~ * Passage deleted and retained
under Section 3(4).

Wayland, 22 May 2012