

Threat of action on Falkland Islands

From Jeremy Morgan
in Buenos Aires

The Argentine Government has warned that it will "put an end" to negotiations with Britain over the disputed sovereignty of the Falkland Islands and feel free to take other action unless a quick solution of the issue is found.

In a strongly-worded statement which reflected exasperation at what is seen as British foot-dragging, the Foreign Ministry said yesterday that unless there was progress, Argentina would consider itself free to choose "a procedure which better suited its interests."

Argentina has negotiated with Britain "with patience, fidelity and in good faith" for more than 15 years under the terms of United Nations resolutions over its claim to the Falkland Islands, the Ministry added.

In diplomatic terms the Ministry warning was forceful, although officials have yet to indicate what sort of action the Government might be contemplating.

The strong phraseology contrasted strongly with the polite tone of a joint statement issued by both countries after the latest round of negotiations, which were held in New York on Friday and Saturday of last week.

This said that the talks had been "cordial and positive" and that both sides had reasserted their decision to find a solution. The two governments would be considering a procedural proposal aimed at bringing about more progress in that direction, the statement added.

The Argentines have revealed that in New York they put forward a plan under which the two sides would meet once a month to discuss an agreed agenda. If adopted, such negotiations would mark a radical departure from the practice of recent years: since 1977, talks have been held about once a year.

The aim of the Argentinian move will be to achieve "substantial results in a time that, at this stage of the talks, will necessarily have to be short," according to a top-level official.

This is not the first indication that the Argentinians may be losing their patience over resolving their claim to the islands, which lie 300 miles from Argentina in the south Atlantic.

Public opinion over the islands, which Argentina calls the Malvinas and have laid claim to ever since British troops occupied the islands in 1833, is also starting to run high.

The suspected presence of oil in considerable quantities in the waters off the islands—conservative estimates put probable reserves at around 2.4 billion barrels—has done little to keep tempers cool.

But despite the optimistic assertions of British officials, who stressed yesterday that their position had not changed, the two sides seem as far apart as ever. Britain maintains that because the talks are taking place it does not necessarily mean that sovereignty will eventually be transferred to Argentina.

But this is exactly how Buenos Aires saw the purpose of holding negotiations in the first place. The indications from the latest statement are that Argentina believes that London has not been listening.

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