

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

Buenos Aires, March 23, 1982, 1916Z

1638. Subject: Weekend Episodes in the South Georgia and Falkland/Malvinas Islands.

1. (U) All Buenos Aires morning dailies March 23 bannered the weekend flag-raising incident involving Argentine seamen in the South Georgia Islands on March 19, denounced yesterday in London. British Ambassador Anthony Williams was summoned this morning to the Foreign Ministry for a discussion of the issue, which now appears complicated by the retaliation by British Falkland Islanders. On March 22, learning of the Argentine activity, the Falkland "Kelpers" reportedly attacked the offices of Argentina's state airline in Port Stanley. They lowered the Argentine flag over the building and hoisted the Union Jack, vowing "an eye for an eye", according to local press reports.

2. (U) The GOA initial reaction Monday evening² to the British complaint about the crew of an Argentine Government vessel landing in Leith Harbor in the South Georgia Islands, about 900 miles east of the Falklands, seemed bland. A spokesman explained that an Argentine Navy cargo transport, the "Bahia Buen Suceso", had been routinely chartered to a private firm to work in the Islands, as it had to other private operators in South Atlantic ports. The March 23 press reported that in this instance, the ship was being used to salvage scrap from an abandoned whale processing facility owned by the Christian

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Foreign Policy File, D820154-0489. Confidential; Priority. Sent for information to London and USUN.

² March 22.

Salvendsen firm. The spokesman said when this work was completed March 21, the vessel and its privately-chartered crew left the area.

3. (U) Asked about the Falklanders' attack on the LADE office, the FonMin spokesman said the situation could become "grave". LADE is Lineas Aereas del Estado, a small Argentine Air Force feeder airline which is the Falklands' main connection to the mainland. Its offices in Port Stanley reportedly had its locks forced by irate British Islanders, who then took down the Argentine flag on the building and hung a British flag on a tree in front of it. There were no other reports of damages.

4. (C) During a meeting March 23, the Foreign Minister and Under Secretary Ros at their initiative briefed the Ambassador on the Argentine version of this affair. They said a local entrepreneur had entered into a contract in London to take the scrap from the whale "factory." He then hired a crew of workmen (four they thought) and bought passage for them on the "Bahia Buen Suceso" which deposited them in Leith. Ros emphasized that the ship regularly plies those waters, is unarmed and crewed entirely by civilians.

5. (C) HMG protested because permission was not sought to land the workmen. As indicated in the press, the ship has departed; but, contrary to the impression left by the press accounts, the workmen are still there, according to Ros. He was unable to say how long they might remain, that presumably depending on the time required to finish the scrap job and on when the ship might come around again. It would seem, at least, that the incident may not be closed.

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