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AGAINST DELIVERY

STATEMENT ON SOUTH GEORGIA, TO BE MADE BY MR RICHARD LUCE MP,
IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ON TUESDAY 30 MARCH 1982

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to repeat a statement on South Georgia, which my right honourable and noble Friend has made in another place.

As I told the House on 23 March, a group of Argentines, employed by a commercial contractor, Mr Davidoff, an Argentine citizen, landed at Leith Harbour on South Georgia on 19 March from an Argentine Naval transport vessel.

Mr Davidoff had been informed in advance of the need to seek the necessary permission from the British authorities at Grytviken to land and to carry out this salvage work. He conveyed to the British Embassy in Buenos Aires his intention to begin work in South Georgia but gave no indication that he would not follow the normal immigration procedures.

When the party arrived at Leith they did not seek the required documentation: and when requested by the Base Commander to proceed to Grytviken in order to do so, they failed to comply. Mr Davidoff's commercial contract is straightforward. But it does not absolve him or his employees from complying with normal immigration procedures.

Subsequently, the majority of the Argentine party and the Argentine ship departed: but about a dozen men remained on shore.

We therefore made it clear to the Argentine Government that we regarded them as being present illegally on British territory, and sought their cooperation in arranging for their departure, pointing out however that their position could be regularised if they were to seek the necessary authorisation. Meanwhile, HMS Endurance was ordered to proceed to the area to be available to assist as necessary. She has been standing by since 24 March.

On 25 March an Argentine vessel delivered further equipment to the group ashore. The Argentine Foreign Minister has said that the Argentine party in South Georgia will be given the full protection of the Argentine Government. Argentine warships are in the area.

The situation which has thus arisen, while not of our seeking, is potentially dangerous. We have no doubts about

British sovereignty over this Falkland Islands dependency as over the Falklands themselves.

We remain of the view that the unauthorised presence of Argentine citizens in British territory is not acceptable. We have no wish to stand in the way of a normal commercial salvage contract, but the position of those carrying it out must be properly authorised.

Further escalation of this dispute is in no one's interest. In these circumstances it is clearly right to pursue a diplomatic solution of this problem. This we are doing. I hope that the Argentine Government will take the same view. Meanwhile, the question of security in the Falklands area is being reviewed, although the House will understand that I prefer to say nothing in public about our precautionary measures.

I can, however, inform the House that HMS Endurance will remain on station as long as is necessary.

South Georgia Parliamentary Statement

As my noble friend Lord Trefgarne informed the House on 23 March a group of Argentines employed by a commercial contractor Mr Davidoff, an Argentine citizen landed Leith harbour on South Georgia on 19 March from an Argentine naval transport vessel.

Mr Davidoff had been informed in advance of the need to seek the necessary permission of the British authorities at Grytviken, to land and to carry out its work. He conveyed to the British Embassy in Buenos Aires his intention to begin work in South Georgia but gave no indication that he would ignore the normal immigration procedures of which he had been told.

When the party arrived at Leith they did not seek the required documentation and when requested by the base commander to proceed to Grytviken in order to do so they failed to comply. Mr Davidoff's commercial contract is straightforward but it does not absolve him or his employees from complying with normal immigration procedures. Subsequently the majority of the Argentinian party and the Argentinian ship departed: but about a dozen men remained on shore .

/We

We therefore sought the co-operation of the Argentine Government in arranging for their departure, making clear that we regarded them as being present illegally on British territory, but that they could regularise their position by seeking the necessary authorisation at Grytviken. Meanwhile, HMS Endurance was ordered to proceed to the area to be available to assist as necessary. She has been standing by since 24 March.

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The situation ^{which} has thus arisen while not of our seeking is potentially dangerous. We have no doubts about British sovereignty over this Falkland Islands dependency, as over the Falklands themselves.

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/Further

Further escalation of this dispute is in no-one's interest. In these circumstances it is our clear duty to pursue, with all the ~~force~~ imagination and energy at our disposal, a diplomatic solution of this problem. This we are doing. I hope the House will agree that to release the detail of diplomatic exchanges at this stage would make our efforts less rather than more likely to succeed. I hope the Argentine Government will take the same view. Meanwhile the question of security in the Falklands area is under review although the House will understand that I prefer to say nothing in public about our precautionary measures. HMS Endurance will remain on station.