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GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Agenda items 25, 43, 63 and 66

QUESTION OF THE FALKLAND ISLANDS (MALVINAS)

IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 37/71

CONCERNING THE SIGNATURE AND RATIFICATION OF
ADDITIONAL PROTOCOL I OF THE TREATY FOR THE
PROHIBITION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN LATIN AMERICA
(TREATY OF TLATELOLCO)

REVIEW AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONCLUDING DOCUMENT

OF THE TWELFTH SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE
STRENGTHENING OF INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

SECURITY COUNCIL

Thirty-eighth year

Letter dated 3 November 1983 from the Permanent Representative of
Argentina to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to write you with reference to the "Question of the Malvinas".

On numerous occasions, 1/ my Government has expressed its deep concern about the British Government's decision to establish a military base on the Malvinas Islands. My Government has also pointed out that the British military build-up in the South Atlantic represents a most serious obstacle to the dissipation of tensions in the area of the Malvinas, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands.

The installation of the military base by the colonial Power is not only a provocation against Argentina but is also a source of growing concern for Latin America. There is no doubt that the current British military escalation in our region is part of a global strategic policy which flouts Latin America's genuine interest in achieving peace and security and is designed to create a new and dangerous focal point of East-West conflict.

A/38/567
S/16125
English
Page 2

This view has been openly confirmed by the British Secretary of Defence, Mr. Michael Heseltine, who recently stated that, although the Malvinas Islands are not now a target of the Soviet Union, they will be in the coming decades, and it is then that the strategic value for the West of the construction on the Islands of the new airfield will be demonstrated .

He added that the victory in the South Atlantic demonstrated the credibility of the Atlantic Alliance's deterrent power and that, as one of the many lessons it has learnt from the war the British Government has decided to improve its strategic capability and aerial mobility in order to support operations outside NATO's geographical sphere. 2/

Furthermore, the present United Kingdom "civilian administrator" in the Malvinas Islands, Mr. Hunt, has stressed that the islands are located near the South American coast and on Antarctica's border adding that no one can predict the military and commercial importance they may have in 50 years. 3/

In this light, the assertion made by Sir Geoffrey Howe, British Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, that the strategic airfield in the Malvinas Islands is being constructed solely to ensure the most effective and economical protection of the islands 4/ does not appear to reflect his Government's true intentions.

In fact, the characteristics and cost of the military base (see annex) leave no doubt as to the global nature and long-term thrust of the current policy in the South Atlantic of the United Kingdom, a nuclear Power and member of NATO. Argentina, whose fundamental rights and vital interests are being seriously jeopardized by the very presence of colonial Britain in territories usurped from it, must again point out that a project such as the one described would be simply intolerable. The decolonization and recovery of the Malvinas Islands are the constant and primary objectives of the entire Argentine people. In this context, Argentina reiterates its firm intention to co-operate in a negotiated solution of the sovereignty dispute with the United Kingdom in conformity with General Assembly resolution 37/9 which, I must point out, has still not been accepted by the British Government.

I would request you to have this note circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 25, 43, 63 and 66, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Carlos Manuel MUÑIZ
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Notes

1/ Letters to the Secretary-General dated 28 June 1983 (A/38/287-S/15849) and 16 July 1983 (A/38/301-S/15873); statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Argentina during the general debate at the thirty-eighth session of the General Assembly (A/38/PV.6); statements by the Permanent Representative of Argentina in the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples on 31 August 1983 (A/AC.109/PV.1238) and in the Fourth Committee on 19 October 1983 (A/C.4/38/SR.4).

2/ Lecture by the British Secretary of Defence at the Centre for Strategic Studies of Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., 14 September 1983.

3/ Daily Express, London, 3 August 1983.

4/ Press conference, New York, 26 September 1983.

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ANNEX

British military base in the Malvinas

I. British military forces in the South Atlantic a/

- (a) Army: More than 4,000 troops comprising anti-aircraft, mechanized infantry, reconnaissance, artillery (equipped with Rapier missiles), logistical and engineering units.
- (b) Navy: One aircraft carrier, one or two nuclear submarines, five or six destroyers, three frigates, three patrol vessels, landing craft equipped with anti-aircraft weapons. b/
- (c) Air Force: Squadrons of Phantom, Harrier, Nimrod and Buccaneer aircraft; Sea King helicopters, a squadron of Chinook helicopters, troop and equipment carriers (Hercules C-130 and others) b/

II. Strategic military airfield

The airfield under construction will be equipped to handle the largest and most sophisticated combat aircraft. It will have a runway almost 3,000 metres long and almost 1,400 workers will be employed in its construction. The cost of construction, officially placed at £215 million, is estimated by British sources to be £420 and even £600 million. c/

The company awarded the contract for its construction is the same company which built a similar airfield on Diego Garcia.

South Africa will be used as a logistical support base; vessels transporting personnel, material, equipment, fuel and drinking water for the airfield will depart from South Africa. The South African airline will also co-operate in the transportation. d/

III. Port

The objective is to complete an air and sea facility identical to the military base on Diego Garcia. The British Government will shortly invite tenders for the construction of a military port near to the airfield. e/ The existing port will be expanded by the construction of a floating dock at a cost of £23 million.

IV. Radars

A radar system ("Project Zeus"), equipped with two-AR3D radars, has been installed. f/

V. Communications station

The United Kingdom has constructed a satellite communications station on the Malvinas at a cost of £2 million. g/

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VI. Military base on South Georgia

A British joint military team is examining the possibility of building an additional air and sea base on this territory. h/

VII. Cost of the military base

A recent study conducted by the University of Bradford estimates the annual cost of the military base at approximately £1 billion for the next ten years. During the period from 1983 to 1986, this figure will be even higher (£1.1 billion a year), since it will be necessary to replace the vessels and equipment lost during the south Atlantic conflict and to include the cost of construction of the strategic airfield, the installation of the satellite communications station and the radars.

This cost is equivalent to more than £6 million for each inhabitant of the islands over a ten-year period. Moreover, it is higher than the cost of the entire air defence system of the United Kingdom itself.

Notes

a/ Report of the British Secretary of State for Defence to Parliament.

- "The Military Balance 1983-1984", International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, September 1983.

- The Times, 8 and 10 October 1983.

- Daily Telegraph 16 August and 24 October 1983.

b/ All vessels and aircraft with nuclear capability are equipped with complete arsenals, including nuclear weapons.

c/ Daily Telegraph, London, 4 September 1983.

d/ Ibid., 3 September 1983.

e/ Ibid., 22 October 1983.

f/ Ibid., 9 May 1983.

g/ Ibid., 14 October 1983.

h/ Ibid., 27 August 1983.
