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QUESTION OF THE FALKLAND ISLANDS  
(MALVINAS)SECURITY COUNCIL  
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Letter dated 29 May 1985 from the Permanent Representative of  
the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to  
the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to refer to the letter of 16 May from the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Worship of Argentina (A/40/317-S/17196) about the opening of the new airport at Mount Pleasant in the Falkland Islands and, on instructions from my Government, to state the following.

This airport has a dual civil and military role. It has from the first been planned to contribute significantly to the future economic development of the Islands, as well as improving our capacity to reinforce the Islands in an emergency, should that be necessary.

The United Kingdom Government has consistently sought better relations with Argentina. But it remains determined as well to fulfil its clear commitments to the Falkland Islanders under the United Nations Charter and the United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The people of the Falkland Islands suffered a traumatic invasion and military occupation only three years ago. Not surprisingly, they expect the administering power to defend them against any renewed attack. The construction of a new airport, suitable for use by modern wide-bodied jets, is a necessary element in the United Kingdom Government's policy of deterring aggression and of providing for the defence of the Islands against attack. The United Kingdom's forces are maintained at the minimum level necessary to fulfil this defensive mission. They threaten no one. Indeed their presence contributes to peace and security in the region.

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\* A/40/50/Rev.1.

Mount Pleasant Airport will also meet the needs identified in Lord Shackleton's economic studies of 1976 and 1982 for better communications with the outside world and, in particular, improved air services. From the beginning it will be used by civilian passengers travelling on internal flights and on flights to and from Britain. When completed, it will be available for commercial operators wishing to establish external air services.

The Argentine Foreign Minister refers to United Kingdom Government expenditure on the Falklands. But his letter ignores the fact that the major part of the costs to which he refers are the cost of the operation to recover the Falkland Islands and the cost of replacing equipment lost in the conflict, of which the purpose was to enable the Falkland Islanders to live again under a Government of their own choosing. The United Kingdom Secretary of State for Defence, Mr. Heseltine, made plain at the opening ceremony of Mount Pleasant Airport on 12 May that it is not and has never been the United Kingdom Government's intention to fortify the Islands or establish them as a "strategic" base, and that there was no NATO dimension to our involvement there.

The Argentine Foreign Minister's letter purported to quote a statement by a British Minister suggesting that there would be no significant reduction in the number of troops currently stationed in the Falkland Islands. This is a blatant misrepresentation of statements made by Ministers of the United Kingdom Government in Parliament.

The United Kingdom Government's statement on the defence estimates, published on 1 May 1985, reported that there had already been a steady reduction in forces in the Falkland Islands over the past year. British Ministers have consistently stated that once the airport is fully operational it should be possible to reduce still further the number of permanently-stationed forces on the Islands.

The Argentine Foreign Minister accuses the United Kingdom of violating commitments it has undertaken within the inter-American framework and of introducing nuclear weapons into the South Atlantic. We assume this to be a reference to the obligations the United Kingdom has undertaken under the additional protocols to the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which Argentina has not ratified. It is the long-standing practice of nuclear-weapon States for reasons of security and safety, neither to confirm nor deny the presence or absence of nuclear weapons in any location at any particular time. However, the United Kingdom Government has at all times complied, and will continue to comply, with its obligations under the additional protocols:

First, in not deploying nuclear weapons in territories for which the United Kingdom is internationally responsible within the Treaty's zone of application, which include the Falkland Islands;

Second, in not deploying such weapons in the territories for which the Treaty is in force.

The United Kingdom Government regrets the Argentine Foreign Minister's gratuitous references to Antarctica, in relation to which the two Governments maintain working relations within the framework of the Antarctic Treaty system.

The Falkland Islands do not lie within the area of application of the Treaty. There is, moreover, no foundation whatsoever for the assertion that the aims of the United Kingdom in the Falkland Islands or in Antarctica are incompatible with British obligations under the Antarctic Treaty. British stations in the Antarctic, like Argentine stations, have recently been inspected under the terms of Article VII of the Antarctic Treaty by the Government of the United States. No activity has been found at any of these stations that is inconsistent with the purposes and principles of the Antarctic Treaty.

The Argentine Foreign Minister concludes his letter by repeating that the United Kingdom should agree to negotiate on the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, and attempts to argue that there is an obligation in this sense under the United Nations Charter. The United Kingdom Government's attitude is wholly consistent with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations. It is a misrepresentation of the Charter to suggest that the obligation to seek solutions by peaceful means requires that, irrespective of the circumstances, recourse must be had, solely or even primarily, to negotiations. The United Kingdom is committed to the peaceful settlement of international disputes. We were negotiating on the very subject of sovereignty when Argentina launched its brutal invasion of the Islands in 1982. The United Kingdom cannot ignore those tragic events, nor can the present Government of Argentina escape their consequences.

The United Kingdom Government wishes to achieve the restoration of more normal relations with Argentina. It recognizes, of course, that Britain and Argentina hold different positions on the questions of sovereignty over the Falkland Islands. If direct talks are not to founder at the outset on the issue that divides us, it will be essential that they do not address the sovereignty issue.

We have made a sustained effort to restore bilateral relations with Argentina on a realistic basis. Earlier this year we transmitted the latest in a series of messages through the protecting powers. Once again we put forward practical steps that would enable confidence to be restored between Britain and Argentina. The Government of Argentina have not yet replied to that message. The United Kingdom Government looks forward to a constructive response, avoiding pre-conditions that prevent direct talks taking place, and seeking instead through discussion of specific subjects to move towards reconciliation between our two countries.

I request that this note be given the same distribution as that from the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Worship of Argentina.

(Signed) J. A. THOMSON

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