

British sub on the move

By Our Foreign Staff

A nuclear-powered submarine was believed to be on its way to join HMS Endurance on its lonely vigil of the Falkland Islands dependencies of South Georgia last night, together with a supply-vessel of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

But, in London the Royal Navy refused to confirm or deny these reports on the grounds that ship movements of this nature were classified. The submarine thought to be 4,000-tonnes HMS Superb, detached itself several days ago from the exercise Spring Train in which up to 14 vessels have been manoeuvring near Gibraltar.

It belongs to the Swiftsure class of hunterkiller boats designed to attack enemy submarines and surface raiders and is armed with heavyweight torpedoes which she would fire from five, 21-inch tubes. It carries a crew of nearly 100 officers and men and was commissioned six years ago

The Government is prepared to use force, if diplomacy fails. This was the clear implication of statements made to both Houses of Parliament yesterday by Lord Carrington, the Foreign Secretary, and Mr Richard Luce, Minister of State at the Foreign Office.

Meanwhile, Señor Nicanor Costa Mendez, the Argentine Foreign Minister, said that Argentina would not bow to any pressure. He said that the Argentines who are dismantling a whaling station in South Georgia were on national territory and could count on the protection of the Argentine authorities.

The statements were made as naval activity in the South Atlantic increased.

A Royal Fleet Auxiliary supply ship was on its way to the South Georgia area last night with food, fuel and other supplies for HMS Endurance, the patrol ship. The purpose is to allow the patrol vessel to remain in the area without having to put into port.

The Argentine Navy's flagship, the 25 de Mayo, a British-built Columbus class light aircraft carrier purchased from the Netherlands in 1969, and two destroyers have sailed from Puerto Belgrano.

An Argentine Air Force C130 hercules also flew over the islands yesterday, and residents said that the night before a heavy aircraft without lights flew over outlying settlements.

The British scientific survey vessel John Biscoe arrived with about 40 marines to reinforce the garrison of 36 already guarding the wind-swept south Atlantic islands.

The John Biscoe left Port Stanley, the capital, shortly afterwards, but another unarmed British survey vessel, the Bransfield, remained in port.

Both British ministers said in Parliament that the crisis, storming from the illegal landing of a group of Argentine scrap merchants on South Georgia, was potentially dangerous. But it was emphasized that further escalation of the dispute was in no one's interest and that a peaceful solution was the aim of the British Government.

In the Commons, where pressure was heaviest for an indication of what would happen if diplomatic negotiations failed, Mr Luce repeated on several occasions that if necessary the islands would be defended as effectively as possible.