

Impenetrable silence on Falklands crisis

By Our Foreign Staff

Mr Richard Luce, Minister of State at the Foreign Office, has postponed a visit he was due to make to Mexico, starting today, because of the crisis with Argentina over the British territory of South Georgia.

The crisis began with the illegal landing on South Georgia, a dependency of the Falkland Islands, of a group of Argentine scrap merchants two weeks ago.

Christian Salvesen Ltd, the company which owns the derelict whaling station in South Georgia, said in Edinburgh yesterday that when the contract for the salvage expedition was signed in 1979, it was done with "the

consent and knowledge", if not the approval, of the Foreign Office, and the Governor of the Falklands Islands.

Mr Luce and Lord Carrington, the Foreign Secretary, have committed Britain to defending the Falklands, but have emphasized in Parliament their wish for diplomatic solution. In Buenos Aires, the army, navy and air force high commands met yesterday to analyse the British speeches.

Mr Rex Hunt, the Falklands governor, said last night that Argentina had rejected two British proposals to end the dispute. One was that an Argentine ship should take the scrap merchants to the tiny British

settlement of Grytviken to undergo immigration procedures.

The other was that a neutral vessel take British officials to the Argentine camp to carry out the procedures.

One view in Whitehall is that the Argentine authorities may be seeking to capitalize on the illegal landing by the scrap merchants, but were not implicated in causing it.

Argentine naval strength in the South Atlantic includes its only aircraft carrier, the 25 de Mayo, two destroyers and two missile-carrying corvettes. There are also reports that an Argentine submarine has been sent into the area.

The report involving the Royal Navy's nuclear powered 4,500-ton Superb, which is armed with Tigerfish heavyweight torpedos, is beginning to look more and more like a controlled leak which need not even be true to have the desired effect. The Royal Navy has refused to confirm that Superb was on its way to South Georgia.

Plans to reinforce the Falkland Islands, or not as the case may be, remained among Whitehall's more cherished secrets last night after another day of impenetrable silence at the Ministry of Defence.

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