

Rising Tensions in South Atlantic: Britain Defends Falklands Position

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Britain is standing by its position on the Falkland Islands amid rising tensions over oil exploration.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant, UK permanent representative to the United Nations, said: "As British ministers have made clear, the UK has no doubt about its sovereignty over the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and the Sandwich Islands.

"This position is underpinned by the principle of self-determination as set out in the UN Charter.

"We are also clear that the Falkland Islands government is entitled to develop a hydrocarbons industry within its waters, and we support this legitimate business in Falklands' territory."

His statement came after Argentina's foreign minister said he had asked the UN secretary general to continue his efforts to resolve the dispute over an area of the southern Atlantic Ocean where the UK has begun drilling for oil.

Jorge Taiana told reporters after the meeting with Ban Ki-moon that the UN chief was not happy to learn that the situation was worsening and was willing to continue his "good offices" mission.

The dispute stemmed from Britain allowing Desire Petroleum's Ocean Guardian to begin drilling 60 miles north of the islands after Argentina announced new shipping controls.

Defence Minister Bill Rammell said the Government will take "whatever steps are necessary" to protect the islands, which had a "legitimate right" to develop an oil industry within their waters.

Argentinian president Cristina Fernandez ruled out any plans to try to keep the British boats or rigs out. "We do not believe in methods like blockades," she told reporters.

However in a statement to regional leaders in Cancun, Mexico she reiterated Argentina's claim to the islands and blamed the Foreign Office for fanning tensions.

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