



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

20 December, 1982

Dear Tam.

Thank you for your letter of 13 December. I too am puzzled: in my case by your inability to accept that the General Belgrano was attacked for sound military reasons.

As Peter Blaker confirmed on 29 November, the General Belgrano was on a course of  $280^{\circ}$  at the moment she was attacked. She had made many changes of course throughout the day and could have done so again at any moment. On a converging course, she and her escorts would have engaged ships of the task force in a matter of hours. I therefore see no inconsistency between our two answers. The General Belgrano's course at the moment of attack was merely incidental to the very real threat that she posed to our ships and our men.

I can only repeat that the facts underlying the attack of the General Belgrano are as given to you both in the House and at the presentation by the Task Force Commanders that you attended in the Ministry of Defence on 23 November. In short, there were indications on 2 May that the Belgrano group to the South and the carrier 25 De Mayo and her escorts to the North threatened the task force with a pincer attack. In order to avert this threat, a change in the Rules of Engagement, to allow an attack on the General Belgrano within the terms of our warning on 23 April was sought and agreed. As Admiral Fieldhouse has said in his Official Despatch, it was a threat that could not be ignored.

Tam Dalyell, Esq., M.P.

Yours sincerely  
Margaret Thatcher SW