

Hd / Defence Dept

I (11)

And my understanding too, with the rider that the Belgrano was recognised as being a possible, even likely, target.

This is certainly my understanding also. It is striking (though not surprising) to see that the Belgrano incident has affected attitudes abroad — of the Germans.

Mr Gillmore

Mr Wright

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12/5

THE BELGRANO

UKDEL NATO have provided an informal note of discussion at the Eurogroup Ministerial dinner in Brussels on 5 May, done by Mr Tebbit who is Secretary to the Eurogroup. Paragraph 5 of this note records Mr Nott as saying "..... the political decision was taken by a group of Cabinet Ministers, chaired by the Prime Minister, to attack the GENERAL BELGRANO which was closing on the Task Force".

2. I have not been able to find any record in the minutes of ODSA for such a decision. It had been my understanding that the sinking of the BELGRANO had followed a decision by Ministers over the weekend in question that existing ROEs should be relaxed in such a way as to permit our SSNs to attack Argentine warships whether or not within the TEZ, but without specific reference to the Argentine cruiser. Again, according to the information given by CDS at the Chiefs of Staff Committee in response to a question by Mr Wright on the morning after the sinking, the BELGRANO had not entered the TEZ and was heading in a South Westerly direction at the time the attack took place.

3. Since he was present at Chequers during the ODSA meeting in question, you may wish to bring this to the attention of the PUS. It may of course simply be that I am less than fully informed on the subject, but the point is symptomatic of the difficulty we face in keeping up with Ministers, when short cuts are taken.

ALQ 050/25
MAY 1982

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P J Weston
Defence Department

11 May, 1982

My understanding of the point is the same as Mr Weston's (para 2 above).

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12/5

5. As regards the immediate situation, Mr Nott said that the UK had received clear evidence that the junta had decided to attack the task force. On 23 April the UK had already issued a warning, lodged with the UN, that if threatened, the fleet would be free to respond. Three or four days ago there were air attacks and a submarine had also been found in the area of the task force. If RN ships had not been allowed to respond there would have been many more losses on our side. In these circumstances the political decision was taken by a group of Cabinet Ministers, chaired by the Prime Minister, to attack the General Belgrano which was closing on the task force.* Yesterday of course, we had our own disaster when SHEFFIELD was successfully attacked.

6. At no time had the UK ceased in its search for a diplomatic solution. We were prepared to compromise and realised that we must. There was flexibility on transitional arrangements and a readiness to go into fresh negotiations about sovereignty without any pre-conditions. The only thing the UK insisted on was withdrawal of Argentine troops. A cease-fire without withdrawal would be unacceptable and bring damaging consequences for the Alliance itself and all it stood for.

7. In response to a question from the Danish Defence Minister about the airfields on the Falklands, Mr Nott said that these had been destroyed. Argentina was now unable not only to re-supply its troops from the mainland, but also to re-supply between the islands themselves. The UK did not enjoy complete air superiority but it did have an effective air blockade. As a result there was the prospect of Argentine troop morale deteriorating fast as the bad weather approached.

8. Mr Van Mierlo asked about the attitude of South American nations. Mr Nott said that although he had no detailed knowledge of this, his impression was that there was a very cautious attitude towards Argentina based on mistrust of the junta. There had certainly been verbal support in the OAS but there was no evidence that words would be matched by deeds. Even Venezuela had not sent her Navy as promised. The political solidarity of the OAS was of course an important consideration which meant that there were problems in relations between

/Europe

* Two destroyer escorts, which had been left alone, surprisingly did not remain to pick up survivors but steamed away immediately.