

SECRET : CMO



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

14 February 1985

Dear Richard,

SINKING OF THE BELGRANO: DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION TO
THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

I wrote to you on this subject on 7 February. The matter was reviewed by the Prime Minister with Ministers directly concerned following Cabinet today.

It was agreed that the Defence Secretary should say, in his speech in the debate on 18 February, that the Government would let the Foreign Affairs Committee see the documents in question (the 'Crown Jewels') and that he would invite the Chairman to discuss the details. It would be made clear that this was an exception, made because of the recent Court case, and the rules set out in the Lord Privy Seal's answer to a question on 12 May 1983 stood.

In dealing with any questions before the debate on 18 February, the reply should be that the matter was being given careful consideration and the Defence Secretary would deal with it in his speech to the House on 18 February.

As regards the conditions under which the Committee would be allowed to see the documents, the Defence Secretary would let his colleagues have detailed recommendations. The presumption should be that the members of the Committee and its Clerk would be allowed to see and examine the documents under supervision on Ministry of Defence premises, but should not be allowed to retain them or to make notes. The documents would not become the Committee's property and could not be published in evidence.

The question was also raised whether the Defence Secretary should reveal in his speech the official advice tendered to him on what should be revealed to Parliament about the Belgrano. There were evident risks in going beyond established rules: on the other hand, much of the material had already been made available in Court.

/It was agreed

A handwritten signature, possibly 'SE', written in dark ink.

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It was agreed that the Defence Secretary could draw upon papers which had been requested in the Ponting case and given in open court (subject to taking advice on whether this definition is secure against further pressure to extend it), and subsequently lay such papers in the Library of the House.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, Home Secretary, Lord Privy Seal, Chief Whip and Attorney General and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

*Yours sincerely,
Charles Powell*

CHARLES POWELL

Richard Mottram, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence.

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I have today written to her having received assurances that she was not involved in the decision to prosecute and on that point I am prepared to accept her assurance. I have said this to the Prime Minister in my letter of reply and enclosed several other questions relating to the decision to prosecute.

(Subject to taking advice on whether this definition is secure against further pressure to extend it)

MOTION FOR BELGRANO DEBATE

That this House recognises that the sinking of the General Belgrano was a necessary and legitimate action in the Falklands ~~conflict~~ (campaign), and agrees ~~that~~ the protection of our armed forces in ~~any future conflict~~ must be the prime consideration in determining how far matters involving national security and the conduct of military operations can be disclosed ~~to Parliament on a public basis.~~

agreed with R. Murray.

told Chris Roberts

at 5.30pm 14/2