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PM/85/4

PRIME MINISTER

BF | Await Def.
 fec's reaction
 (pl. remind by 22 Jan)
 CDP

Rules of Engagement in the South Atlantic

1. I agree to the change in our Rules of Engagement in the South Atlantic proposed in the Defence Secretary's minute of 27 December 1984. It is important that we should take all reasonable steps - without compromising the security of our forces - to reduce the possibility of incidents which Argentina could portray as 'provocation' or 'aggression'. That is fully in line with our wish to achieve more normal relations with Argentina.

2. I also agree that CBFFI should be given the additional discretion to identify contacts close to, but outside, the FIPZ boundary. But we shall need to keep a close watch on the number of such deployments, as well as on the international reaction to this necessary change of policy. We want to minimise the scope for our critics to play it up as "provocative" despite the fact that its only purpose is to avoid incidents involving our forces.

3. It is, I suppose, possible that, given the large area to be covered, an Argentine unit could enter the Central Zone and find itself engaged by our forces without having been detected and warned in the warning zone? One way to minimise the risk of this kind of accidental engagement (paragraph 5 of Michael Heseltine's minute) might be to permit engagement of an intruder in the Central Zone only if it had previously been warned, either there or in the warning zone - unless of course it demonstrated hostile intent by eg activating weapons systems.

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4. I am copying this minute to our OD(EM) colleagues, the Attorney General, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'G. Howe', written in a cursive style.

GEOFFREY HOWE

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

15 January 1985

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