

010

CONFIDENTIAL



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

29 April 1983

Dear John,

Newsnight Programme: Sinking of the Belgrano

John Holmes discussed with you yesterday the fact that Newsnight intend to put out a programme tonight arguing that there are grounds for suspecting that the Belgrano was sunk in order to sabotage the Peruvian peace negotiations. The programme will inevitably include an interview with Tam Dalyell MP. More importantly, we understand from Newsnight that it will also include detailed comments by the then Peruvian Foreign Minister in an interview with Mr Peter Snow, which he claims will add colour to the allegation.

I understand that the Prime Minister has agreed with Mr Heseltine that no-one on the Government side involved in the Falklands conflict should take part in this programme. Mr Alan Clarke MP will however be interviewed.

So far, our News Department have restricted themselves to drawing Newsnight's attention to on the record statements maintaining that the Belgrano was sunk because she posed a threat to British forces and that there was no connection with the Peruvian negotiations. Mr Snow of Newsnight has however threatened that he will include in his programme the statement that HMG were given an opportunity to comment and take part but declined to do so.

The programme in its present shape could obviously be politically damaging, both here and abroad. You may therefore wish to consider the idea of issuing an on the record statement which would set out the relevant facts in time for them to be taken into account in the programme. I enclose a draft of what we have in mind. If action was taken early this afternoon, Newsnight could be pressed to include the statement itself in their film. But it will be useful in any case to have a line in response to questions which the programme will generate.

/I am

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL



I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram in
the Ministry of Defence.

Yours ever,

John

(B J P Fall)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

CONFIDENTIAL

DRAFT ON THE RECORD STATEMENT ABOUT THE SINKING OF
THE GENERAL BELGRANO

In May 1982 the Government had for several weeks been making determined efforts to reach a negotiated solution to the problems caused by Argentina's unprovoked aggression.

The first intimation the Government had of what became known as the US/Peruvian proposals ~~was~~ was in a meeting between Mr Pym and Mr Haig in Washington on Sunday, 2 May. During the meeting Mr Pym made it clear that he would wish to consult his Ministerial colleagues ~~about the proposals~~ ^{At that meeting, therefore,} on his return to London. ^{at that meeting} It is therefore not the case that Britain ~~had accepted or even responded to Peruvian peace proposals.~~ The meeting between Mr Pym and Mr Haig ended at approximately 4.30 p.m. London time.

The General Belgrano was attacked shortly before 8 p.m. London time on 2 May. [It is inconceivable that the attack could have been conceived, planned, ordered and executed in the period between 4.30 and 8.00 p.m.] It is ~~therefore~~ ^{was} nonsense to suggest that the sinking of the Belgrano ~~could have been~~ in any way connected with ~~the~~ Peruvian proposals. As the Government made clear at the time, the Belgrano was sunk for ~~purely~~ ^{purely} military reasons.

29 APR 1985





10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

29 April 1983

NEWSNIGHT PROGRAMME: SINKING OF THE BELGRANO

Thank you for your letter of 29 April which I have discussed with Richard Mottram. We subsequently spoke on the telephone.

Our Press Section will be stating, on the record, to Mr. Peter Snow that:

"As the Government made clear at the time, the Belgrano was sunk for military reasons. It is nonsense to suggest that it was in any way connected with the Peruvian proposals. Moreover, negotiations continued actively for a further two weeks until 17 May when Argentina rejected the proposals we had put forward".

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence).

A. J. COLES

Brian Fall, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

On the record statement from No 10 about the sinking of the General Belgrano:

"As the Government made clear at the time, the Belgrano was sunk for military reasons. It is nonsense to suggest that it was in any way connected with the Peruvian proposals. Moreover, negotiations continued actively for a further two weeks until 17 May when Argentina rejected the proposals we had put forward."

MR COLES

*Discussed with
Mr. Kydd.*

*AM 29.
4*

cc Miss Christopherson
Mr Kydd

The BBC Newsnight programme tomorrow evening will use a filmed interview with Stella, former Peruvian Foreign Minister, on the sinking of the Belgrano.

Essentially what Stella says is that:

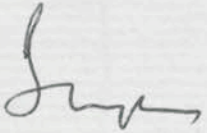
- before the Prime Minister took a decision to authorise the sinking of the Belgrano both the Argentine and the UK were responding very positively to Peruvian peace proposals;
- he had a 4-hour telephone conversation with his President in which Al Haig joined, and he implies that Francis Pym was in on the conversation sitting next to Haig;
- during that conversation it was clear to him (Stella) that agreement in principle was in the bag;
- Galtieri himself, in the early hours of Sunday morning - well before the sinking - personally accepted the seven-point plan and would try to get it cleared by the Junta;
- Costa Mendez rang him five hours after the Belgrano was sunk to confirm that the Junta were looking at the proposals which sank along with the Belgrano;
- Stella concludes that but for the sinking there would have been an agreement saving hundreds of lives.

The film of this interview will be followed by a discussion between Alan Clarke MP and Tam Dalyell MP. Peter Snow of Newsnight has asked whether the Government would:

- offer a Minister for interview; they have made no progress with Mr Pym, Mr Parkinson or with senior military men; or
- an on-the-record statement for use by the programme in connection with the showing of the interview.

You will wish to consider whether we should react either on or off-the-record or simply refuse to comment. An alternative would be to brief Alan Clarke.

I am asking Ian Kydd to co-ordinate the Government's approach.



B. INGHAM

28 April 1983

file BRE

20 April 1983

BBC TV PROGRAMME ON THE GENERAL BELGRANO

Thank you for your letter of 19 April.

The Prime Minister entirely agrees with Mr. Heseltine that no member of the Government, nor anyone else directly involved, should participate in the proposed BBC programme about the sinking of the Belgrano.

A. J. COLES

Nick Evans, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence

SB



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1

Telephone 01-~~938 7000~~ 218 2111/3

19/4

MO 22/7 (A)

19th April 1983

(I wholly agree with SPS's view)

Dear John,

BBC TV PROGRAMME ON THE GENERAL BELGRANO

The Prime Minister will wish to know that Peter Snow of the BBC has invited Admiral of the Fleet Sir Henry Leach to take part in a discussion about the sinking of the BELGRANO on the BBC2 Newsnight programme on 2nd May (the first anniversary of the affair). Mr Tam Dalyell has agreed to participate as a critic of the operation and Mr Snow wished Sir Henry to speak in its defence. Sir Henry has now been in touch with the First Sea Lord about this: he was doubtful whether he should agree to take part and was anxious for advice before replying to Mr Snow.

Both Mr Heseltine and Admiral Fieldhouse feel that it would not be appropriate for Sir Henry or, indeed, any other retired naval officer (such as Lord Lewin) to be expected to deal with the points that Mr Dalyell is likely to make. Indeed Mr Heseltine favours no participation by any member of the Government or anyone else directly involved. If it is not possible to persuade Mr Snow to drop the idea of the programme Mr Heseltine feels that the furthest we could go would be to suggest that a Government backbencher, possibly Michael Mates, might appear to argue the case against Mr Dalyell. Sir Henry has been asked for an answer by Thursday of this week and we shall advise him accordingly.

*Yours ever
Nicholas*

(N H R EVANS)