

Prime Minister

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

This is a useful piece of work. The controversy could continue during the election campaign. A.S.C. 4/5.

12 May 1983

Dear John,

The Peruvian Proposals and the General Belgrano

As you will be aware, the allegation that the Belgrano was attacked in order to sabotage Peruvian peace proposals which were on the point of success has gained greater currency recently, notably from a Newsnight special devoted to the story and a piece by Paul Foot in the Daily Mirror. This has stimulated us into looking into the timing of the various events carefully. I enclose a copy of a chronology. I have not enclosed copies of the relevant documents referred to in it but these are of course available if you should wish to see them. The main point is that knowledge of the Peruvian proposals did not reach London until long after the decision to allow an attack on the Belgrano and some hours after the actual attack itself. It is also clear that claims that Mr Pym knew about the Peruvian proposals on 1 May, as stated for example by the former Peruvian Foreign Minister to Newsnight, are incorrect, although Mr Haig may of course for his own reasons have been giving the Peruvians a misleading impression of British acquiescence.

In the light of what the chronology reveals, we have prepared a line on which Ministers might draw if and when this allegation is raised with them, as it might be in the coming weeks. This is obviously too long for use as it stands. Mr Pym believes that the three points which need to be made in response to any allegations are:

- i) The Belgrano was sunk solely for military reasons. The threat was real.
- ii) News of the US/Peruvian proposals only reached London after the attack on the Belgrano. Investigations have shown conclusively that the first intimation we had of the existence of any such proposals was in a vague outline given to Mr Pym by Mr Haig in Washington on 2 May.
- iii) The charge is in any case absurd because the record shows quite clearly how hard we tried both before and after the Belgrano incident to reach a negotiated settlement.

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The first opportunity to use some or all of this line may come in the House this afternoon, when Mr Tam Dalyell has a question down for answer during FCO Questions which would provide him with an opportunity to raise the Belgrano if he wishes. Mr Onslow will speak on the lines above if he does so.

I am copying this to Richard Mottram (Defence), Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office), Tony Rawsthorne (Home Office) and K Long (Duchy of Lancaster).

Yours ever

John Holmes

(J E Holmes)
Private Secretary

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THE US/PERUVIAN PROPOSALS AND THE BELGRANO SINKING

CHRONOLOGY

- A 1 May: HM Ambassador, Lima, calls on the Peruvian Foreign Minister on the morning of 1 May. The latter asks if there is any way the Peruvians could help break the diplomatic deadlock. But he gives no indication that any specific proposals had been formulated or conveyed to either the Argentines or the Americans (Lima telno 134 - sent 011840Z)
- 1 May: Mr Pym arrives in Washington on the evening of 1 May and dines privately at the British Embassy. There is nothing on file to indicate that Mr Haig contacted Mr Pym on the evening of 1 May about the US/Peruvian proposals.
- 2 May: FCO informed at 1230Z that ODSA at Chequers had that morning agreed to relax the Rules of Engagement to enable the Task Force to engage Argentine warships outside the TEZ. Minuting suggests that Mr Pym was not informed of this decision until after his meeting with Mr Haig on 2 May, although he had previously been consulted on the principle of a relaxation of ROE (Mr Wright's minute of 2 May).
- B 2 May: Mr Pym meets Mr Haig for a two-hour discussion on the morning of 2 May (Washington time). Discussion begins at 1330Z.
- C 2 May: Reporting telegram is Washington telno 1566 - sent 022215Z with a deskby London of 030700Z. Mr Haig outlines 'a possible diplomatic solution which had originated in a Peruvian initiative, but had been modified by the Americans in the light of their knowledge of our position'. Mr Haig states that President Belaunde had discussed this 7-point plan with General Galtieri the previous night (1 May) and the Americans had since heard from Costa Mendez that 'Argentina might be able to accept something like them'.
- D

/Mr Pym

Mr Pym responds that 'it might well be that something on these lines could prove useful at the appropriate time'. But further pressure was needed on the Argentines before they were likely to agree to our basic requirements. Mr Haig agrees that 'it was too early to bring any greater precision to the discussions'.

E 2 May: General Belgrano hit by torpedoes at 1900Z.
MOD Press Statement of 2 May.

2 May: Before leaving Washington for New York on the afternoon of 2 May (Washington time), Mr Pym is telephoned by Mr Haig who presses him on the US/Peruvian proposals. There is no record on file of this conversation. But at Mr Pym's request, Sir N Henderson speaks to Mr Haig to emphasise that it was 'too sudden for us to be negotiating new proposals. You [Mr Pym] did not want to be rushed. You had not consulted London about them'.

F Washington telno 1569 - sent 022300Z

2 May: HM Ambassador, Lima, reports that at a press conference at 1800 hours (Peruvian time) on 2 May, President Belaunde stated that Mr Haig had telephoned him 'last night' (1 May) to put to him a 7-point plan. There was as yet no agreement on it but the Argentines were considering it and he hoped to make an announcement later that night (2 May) or the next morning (3 May).

G Lima telno 139 - sent 030144Z

2 May: Peruvian Foreign Minister calls in HM Ambassador at 1830 hours on 2 May (Peruvian time) and states that after their previous conversation on the morning of 1 May, he had, on President Belaunde's instructions, telephoned Costa Mendez to press on him a new formula. This had also been discussed between President Belaunde and Mr Haig and modified as a result of these discussions into a 7-point formula. Dr Arias Stella claims that the formula 'had the approval of Costa Mendez; that General Galtieri had told President Belaunde that he was 'well disposed' towards it but that he had his 'Senate' to consult

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and convince The Military Junta was meeting even at this moment to consider the terms and a reply was expected hourly. Dr Arias said that he had reason to believe that Mr Haig's proposals had been conveyed with the knowledge or at least (sic) the consent of Mr Pym'.

H Lima telno 137 - sent 030103Z

2 May: In response to Lima telnos 137 and 139 (which reached New York late on 2 May after Mr Pym's arrival there), Washington telnos 1566 and 1569 are repeated to Lima and HM Ambassador is instructed to contact the Peruvian Foreign Minister urgently to ensure that no announcement is made in Lima which implies British acceptance of the 7-point formula or that it had been formally presented to the British Government. Mr Pym's position on the proposals is confirmed as that set out in Washington telnos 1566 and 1569. Mr Wallace is also given discretion to tell the Peruvians of the basic British requirements for a settlement.

I UKMIS New York telno 4 - sent 030501Z

3 May: HM Ambassador, Lima, calls on Peruvian Foreign Minister at 0630 hours (Peruvian time) to carry out these instructions. He is informed that 'late last night the Argentine military Junta had rejected the Peruvian proposals quote as a result of the torpedoing of the Argentine cruiser unquote'. Dr Arias adds that the Argentines had not entirely closed the door but needed more time to review any proposals in the light of the most recent developments on the naval front.

J Lima telno 141 - sent 031340Z

3 May: Mr Haig tells Sir N Henderson that he had spoken to the Peruvian President at 0100 hours (Washington time), who had 'complained bitterly that British action had torpedoed the chances of peace'.

K Washington telno 1574 - sent 032012Z

/3 May:



3 May: Mr Haig subsequently tells Sir N Henderson that he had spoken again to President Belaunde, who had said that the Argentine Generals, Iglesias and Moya, had arrived in Lima and that he believed that the 'Argentinians would accept the seven proposals'.

L Washington telno 1575 - sent 032135Z

4 May: First consideration of US/Peruvian proposals in ODSA, following Mr Pym's return from New York on 3 May.



(4)

But it should also be clear that the charge is in any event manifestly unfounded. The Government had from the outset been making enormous efforts to reach a peaceful solution in cooperation with Mr Haig but had met only prevarication and intransigence from Argentina. Mr Haig acknowledged this when he took Britain's side on 30 April, following the failure of his own efforts. The Government nevertheless continued to cooperate fully with peace efforts, first on the US/Peruvian proposals - which were in effect a framework for an agreement and which were accepted as such in a modified form by the UK on 6 May - only to meet rejection from Argentina once again; and later through the UN Secretary General, culminating in the much more detailed British peace proposal of 17 May, subsequently published and widely recognised as reasonable, which was also turned down by Argentina. Against this background it is clear that Britain was actively pursuing a negotiated peace both before and after the attack on the Belgrano on 2 May.



(X)

As the Government have made clear on several occasions, the General Belgrano was attacked solely for military reasons, because she posed a threat to ships of the Task Force. The Falklands were at that time of course under Argentine occupation, following unprovoked Argentine aggression, and the threat to British naval vessels from air and sea was very real.

The proposition that she was attacked in order to sabotage Peruvian-sponsored peace efforts is absurd. A thorough investigation has shown that news of the US/Peruvian proposals only reached London after the attack on the Belgrano. The first intimation we had of the existence of any such proposals came in a series of conversations between Mr Haig and Mr Pym in Washington on 2 May. After Mr Haig outlined elements of a framework for a diplomatic solution these were explored first by Mr Pym and later, after Mr Pym's departure for New York, by Sir N Henderson. Mr Pym and Sir N Henderson made clear to Mr Haig throughout that, following the failure of Mr Haig's own detailed efforts because of the Argentine attitude, we did not wish to be rushed into hasty consideration of these framework elements and would wish to consult the Government in London before giving any reaction. The result of these conversations was telegraphed to London at 2215 GMT, over three hours after the attack on the Belgrano took place.

It is therefore absolutely clear that Ministers in London had no knowledge of any new proposals before the Belgrano was attacked and were acting solely on the basis of the military threat they saw.

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