



Prime Minister
It seems sensible to
make this arrangement.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

A.J.C. 16.9

16 September 1983

Dear John,

Falklands: Search and Rescue Operations in the Vicinity of the
Falkland Islands Protection Zone (FIPZ)

We and the MOD have been considering the possibility of dangerous misunderstandings between ourselves and the Argentines in the event of Search and Rescue (SAR) operations being necessary in sea areas within and along the perimeter of the FIPZ.

The scope for these was illustrated in July. An Argentine search aircraft, probably looking for an Argentine fishing vessel in difficulty, made an incursion into the FIPZ to a depth of 40 miles on 24 July, and Phantoms were scrambled to intercept. The aircraft left the FIPZ before contact could be made.

We and the MOD agree that it is necessary to establish some working arrangement to minimize the risks, in particular the risk of loss of life because of lack of co-ordination with the Argentine rescue authorities. The primary purpose of any working arrangement must be to prevent misunderstanding and to ensure the swiftest possible action to rescue the crews of ships and aircraft in distress. On the other hand we need to be careful to minimize the risk of the Argentines exploiting any arrangement (eg by claiming an SAR emergency as a reason for future incursions into the FIPZ).

The Foreign Secretary does not believe this is an appropriate subject for any sort of negotiation with the Argentine authorities. He takes the view, and MOD Ministers agree, that we should be able to achieve our objectives, both political and humanitarian, by telling the Argentines, via the Swiss, of the action we propose to take to inform the Argentine coastguard authorities by radio of our SAR measures in the event of an emergency within the Protection Zone. We should tell the Argentines at the same time the channel through which we would expect the Argentines to contact us direct in the event of a similar emergency.

/The only



The only quick and reliable method would be for the Argentines to send a telex message, over commercial channels, using a codeword, to the MOD here, who would then inform CBFFI, to enable him to establish contact with the Rescue Co-ordination Centre in Comodoro Rivadavia. This would mean direct contact with the Argentine military authorities, but the Foreign Secretary thinks that any objections can be easily dealt with, given that lives may be at stake. Even if the Argentines do not respond to a Note on these lines we send via the Swiss, we will always be able to refer to it publicly if there is a subsequent confrontation.

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence), and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever

J E Holmes

(J E Holmes)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street