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PS/Minister (AF)  
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MO 5/21

22nd March 1984

Head of DS5

SINKING OF THE BELGRANO

You submitted on 16th March (not to all or needed) advice on the response which might be made to Denzil Davies's letter of 6th March about the circumstances surrounding the sinking of the BELGRANO and in particular when HMS CONQUEROR first detected the ship. The Secretary of State has now received the attached letter from Tam Dalyell posing another 9 questions. Further allegations arising from the book published by Messrs Rice and Gavshon seem likely to arise.

2. Before reaching a view on the line to be taken in the Denzil Davies letter, the Secretary of State wishes to consider the implications of a more forthcoming line for how we would handle new allegations arising from the Gavshon book and how we would respond to Dalyell. The Secretary of State has therefore decided that it would be preferable to delay a reply to Denzil Davies for the time being while we look at the wider context and I have agreed this approach with No 10.

3. The Secretary of State wishes to know the substance of what happened at the beginning of May 1982 in relation to the BELGRANO and the Argentine aircraft carrier in order to judge how much of this can properly be made public without security implications. For the purpose of considering



the substance; he would be grateful for a detailed chronology of the events leading up to the sinking of the BELGRANO. This should cover the answers to the questions raised by Mr Dalyell in his latest letter together with those to the following questions:

- a. What rules of engagement in relation to attacks on Argentine ships were in force prior to 2nd May?
  - b. What was the nature of the intelligence which showed that the BELGRANO group was a threat to the Task Force, when was it first available and when was it drawn directly to the attention of Ministers?
  - c. What was the precise sequence of events and their timings which led to the change in the rules of engagement enabling CONQUEROR to sink the BELGRANO? When was the request initiated, what chain did it pass through, when was it put to Ministers? What was the nature of the decision communicated to HMS CONQUEROR?
  - d. What was the sequence of events in relation to the Peruvian peace initiative and when and in what form was this available to Ministers in London?
  - e. Was any intelligence received which might have suggested that the Argentine Navy had been ordered on or about 1st May to return to port? If so, when was it received and what happened to it?
  - f. Do we know why the then Secretary of State referred in his statement to the House on 4th May 1982 to the BELGRANO being detected at 8pm London time on 2nd May?
4. This list of questions is simply those which occur to me and is not meant to be exhaustive. What the Secretary of State is seeking is a comprehensive account of events which covers all the information and not just that which underpins the main defensive line we have used hitherto. I would be happy to have this in log form with the relevant documents enclosed - given the possible sensitivity of some of the information involved there would be no need of course to copy it widely within the Department.
5. Additionally, I should be grateful for a draft reply to Mr Dalyell's latest letter together with advice on whether the line proposed to be taken with Dalyell affects the line proposed to be taken with Denzil Davies.
6. Would it be possible to have this further advice by midday on Wednesday 28th March, on the assumption that the factual information must already largely have been collected at one stage either here or at Northwood? I should be happy of course to discuss any problems in meeting the Secretary of State's requirements.