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BEGINS

Michael Alison has obtained an early draft of the Foreign Affairs Committee Report on the Belgrano. The draft has been drawn up by the Advisory and Select Committee Staff, with Sir Anthony Kershaw (Chairman). I understand the draft has yet to be circulated to Committee members. It is due to be discussed after the Easter Recess, and expected to be published two weeks or so later. Opposition members are likely to conclude it is a white-wash, dissociate themselves from the draft, and probably put in their own minority report.

← in folder @ back of file .

The conclusions read as follows:

"We conclude that the desire not to reveal all the information in the possession of the Government was and is a proper one, and that the subsequent reluctance to provide the information requested by Members was the result of excessive caution rather than a deliberate or mendacious desire to mislead. In the event, it would almost certainly have been preferable if, when it became apparent that Members were concerned about the events of the weekend of 1 and 2 May, and that the questions would not go away, Ministers had volunteered a comprehensive statement on those events, including much of the material which has been extracted from them so painfully over the last three years.

As a result of the approach adopted by Ministers the House remained for too long in ignorance of information which Members were perfectly entitled to request and some of which ceased to be of operational significance soon after the end of hostilities. To that extent the House was misled about some of the details of the BENGRANO affair. It was not, we believe, the result of a deliberate "cover-up", but of excessive caution on the part of Ministers and their advisers. The House was not, however, misled on the main issue: that the attack on the BELGRANO was authorised for legitimate military reasons, and not out of political design."

Michael Alison is very concerned that the fact we have seen the draft of the Report should in no circumstances get out.

ENDS