



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

6 April 1984

Belgrano

I enclose a copy of a letter which the Prime Minister has received from Mr. Tam Dalyell which has been prompted by the Prime Minister's letter of 4 April to Mr. Denzil Davies.

You will note that Mr. Dalyell has an Oral Question down for answer by the Prime Minister on Thursday 12 April.

In his present letter he asks a number of detailed questions. Subject to your views, I am inclined to advise the Prime Minister not to answer these questions but to reply in the following sense: she takes it that Mr. Dalyell is still trying, as he has tried for the last two years or so, to establish his contention that the Belgrano was attacked in order to destroy the prospects for peace negotiations based on the Peruvian proposals; that is simply not true; she has made the position on this matter absolutely clear yet again in her letter of 4 April to Mr. Denzil Davies; in these circumstances she does not think it useful to prolong these exchanges.

I should be grateful for advice by mid-day on Wednesday, 11 April as to whether the Prime Minister should reply in the above terms.

It would, in any case, be useful if you could let me have brief answers (in a form usable in the House of Commons) to Mr. Dalyell's questions in case he pursues any of these points on 12 April. This is not to say that the Prime Minister would necessarily enter into the substance of the matter in any exchanges with Mr. Dalyell but it will be useful to have the option of so doing if we judge that that is the best tactic. Could this line to take also be available by lunchtime on Wednesday 11 April.

I am copying this letter and enclosure to Peter Ricketts (Foreign and Commonwealth Office).

A. J. COLES

Richard Mottram, Esq.,  
Ministry of Defence.

cc TF  
SS

original held by  
CPL's.

Remembered  
MD.  
this am.  
11/4



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Prime Minister.

5/4/84

Prime Minister

mt

I shall let you have a  
draft copy before 12 April.  
A.S.C. 6/4.

Dear Prime Minister,

Denzil Davies has very kindly given me a copy of your letter to him of April 4th, 1984, responding to his letter of March 6th, 1984, written at the behest of the Shadow Cabinet. Denzil will be replying doubtless, as he thinks fit, after consideration with Shadow Cabinet colleagues. In the meantime, you are aware of my own interest, and I would like to say that your reply does go some way towards confirming a number of facts, to which I have been drawing attention in recent months. You also confirm some of the information contained in the recently published book, "The Sinking of the Belgrano" by Desmond Rice and Arthur Gavshon, about which I am asking you in an Oral Question, Number 5, on Thursday April 12th.

However, your letter, Prime Minister, still leaves a number of serious questions, unanswered and unclear. In view of the Government's ever-changing explanations about the circumstances surrounding your order to sink the Belgrano, it would be helpful if you would address yourself to the following issues:

1. Paragraph 2 of your letter. In backgrounding the military situation on May 1, 1982, you say the air attacks on Port Stanley Airfield were for the purpose of enforcing the Total Exclusion Zone. Since cluster bombs, air-burst shells, and other anti-personnel devices were used, Prime Minister, how can you really suggest that this was part of the process of enforcing the Total Exclusion Zone ?

2. Paragraph 3 of your letter. Was HMS Conqueror<sup>s</sup> instructed to search for and locate the Belgrano by Admiral Woodward, by Fleet Headquarters, Northwood, or by whom? In other words, who perceived the Belgrano Group to be a threat to the Task Force in general, and as you have argued on Television, our Carriers in particular? Candidly, I have suspected



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for many months that the notion that the Belgrano Group were endangering the Task Force emerged as a post-facto rationalisation.

3. Paragraph 3 of your letter. You relate that Admiral Woodward asked for a change in the Rules of Engagement to permit the Belgrano to be attacked outside the Total Exclusion Zone - and, as we all know, you and Members of the War Cabinet agreed to that change. Why then did your former Defence Minister, (Sir) John Nott, a Member of the War Cabinet, who participated in the deliberations on the matter, mislead the House of Commons without any corrective by you, by saying on 4th and 5th May that the decision to torpedo the Belgrano was taken by the Submarine Commander? Parliament, Press, and People were deceived - why?

4. Paragraph 3 of your letter. You refer to destroyers armed with Exocet missiles. Do I take it that the Government is backing away from its original claim that Belgrano also was armed with Exocets?

5. Paragraph 3 of your letter. Can you explain why the Conqueror detected an Argentine oiler auxiliary in the Belgrano Group, when the signals from the 44 year old iron-clad, USS Phoenix (Belgrano) were considerably stronger?

6. Paragraph 3 of your letter. You stress that on 2 May "we had indications about the movements of the Argentine Fleet" which led to Admiral Woodward's request for a change in the Rules of Engagement. What precisely were those "indications"? My information is that the Argentine Fleet was by that time under orders to return to base, and you knew that. Gavshon and Rice in their book cite precise times (20.00 hours on May 1, and 01.19 hours on May 2) when those orders were sent by Admiral Allara, and the Naval Command in Buenos Aires. The text of one of those messages is included in their book.



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7. Paragraph 5 of your letter. You quote Admiral Woodward as saying that his request for a major change to the rules of engagement in order to attack the Belgrano was " the first and only time throughout the campaign " he had made such a request. This is just not true, Prime Minister, because when Conqueror was in Argentine Territorial Waters he again asked for a change in the Rules of Engagement, so as to be able to operate within those waters. ( Reference Gavshon and Rice, Page 130. )

8. Paragraph 5 of your letter. Prime Minister, will you please explain how the Belgrano and her Group, sailing on a 280 degree course, ( confirmed to me in Parliamentary answers ), sailing West North West, could in any way have been completing a pincer movement ? Have you ever heard of naval ships engaging in a pincer movement while retreating to home port in an opposite direction ? And, can you explain how on earth it was that a huge, slow-moving hulk like the ancient Carrier, 25th May, could have "slipped past " the sophisticated, speedy nuclear powered submarine, presumably HMS Splendid, which was " trailing her " and which had been built at a cost of many £millions to the British tax-payer ?

9. Paragraph 6 of your letter. Will you explain, Prime Minister, your assertion that it was irrelevant to the sinking that the Belgrano was heading homewards and well outside the Exclusion Zone and nowhere near the Burdwood Bank ?

10, Paragraph 7 of your letter. Has your Government enquired into the reasons why the British Embassies in Washington and Lima took so long to report on the Peruvian Peace Initiative, and its preparation, if, as you claim " first indications " only reached London at 23.15 hours on May 2, and 0200 hours May 3 respectively ? Did you know that an Associated Press Despatch from Lima, timed 23.44 hours, BST, May 2, said that



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President Fernando Belaunde Terry had announced that Britain and Argentina that night would end hostilities over the Falklands ? Reuters and other international wire services carried similar reports. ( Gavshon and Rice Page xlv )

11. Paragraph 8 of your letter. In what way would earlier disclosure of "first contacts " with the Belgrano Group have prejudiced operations ? Disclosure for instance after the end of hostilities in June 1982 ? Don't you think that it would be far better if you and your Government were to be open and truthful with the House of Commons and the British People ?

I look forward to your early response.

Yours Sincerely,  
Ian Dubs 12/11