



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
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MO 5/21

18th September 1984

CPA.

*Dear Charles,*

LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO MR FOULKES

I now attach a final draft of the letter to Mr Foulkes about events at the end of April and the beginning of May 1982.

The draft takes account of the questions in his further letter of 14th September. It includes, in paragraphs 10-11 of the Annex an account of messages passed and received on 2nd May which has been agreed with Admiral Fieldhouse. The Annex also includes a new paragraph 13 to deal with allegations in the Times on Saturday last.

I am copying this letter and the attachment to Len Appleyard (FCO), Henry Steel (Attorney General's Chambers) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

*Yours ever,*

*Richard Mottram*

(R C MOTTRAM)

C Powell Esq

(JARAFU)

DRAFT LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO GEORGE FOULKES MP

You wrote to me on 23rd August and 14th September about decisions taken by the Government at the time of the Falklands conflict.

2. Your questions reflect a number of fundamental misconceptions about the situation in the South Atlantic in <sup>April and</sup> May 1982. I am enclosing, as an Annex to this letter, a statement of the position which should clear up these misconceptions, and remove any doubts in your mind about the reasons for our actions.

3. To put the matter briefly, in April 1982 Argentina had attacked and invaded British territory; despite intense and continuing diplomatic efforts, Argentina refused to comply with a mandatory resolution of the United Nations Security Council to withdraw its forces; with all-party support, and in exercise of our inherent right of self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter, the British Government despatched the Task Force to the South Atlantic; by the end of April/<sup>as it approached the Falklands Islands</sup> the Task Force was increasingly vulnerable to Argentine attack; by 2nd May it had already been attacked by Argentine aircraft and there were clear and unequivocal indications that it was under further threat from a strong and co-ordinated pincer movement by the major units of the Argentine Navy, including the cruiser 'General Belgrano' and the aircraft carrier '25 de Mayo'. The then Argentine Operations Commander, South Atlantic, has since confirmed publicly that his warships had indeed been ordered to attack. No Government with a proper sense of responsibility could

have refrained from taking appropriate measures to counter the threats to the Task Force, and to ensure its safety to the maximum extent possible. Risks could not be taken especially when hostilities had been so clearly embarked upon by the Argentines.

4. Your questions about the Argentine aircraft carrier and the events on 2nd May are answered in the Annex.

5. You also asked whether a Polaris submarine was deployed as described in the New Statesman article<sup>on 23rd August</sup>. There was no change in the standard deployment pattern of our Polaris submarines during the conflict. Moreover, the Government gave a categorical assurance at the time that nuclear weapons would not be used in the Falklands Conflict (see the statement made by Viscount Trenchard in the House of Lords on 27th April 1982 - Hansard Vol 429, Col 778).

6. I have given you in the Annex as full an account of these matters as, I am advised, is consistent with national security. I must make it clear that it would be, and will remain, quite wrong for me to disclose all the material that was available to Ministers at the time. To do so would still risk irreparable damage to national security and could put lives at risk in the future.

7. Those who seek to criticise the Government's actions (including people outside this country who have every reason to discredit the Government of the United Kingdom) are not subject to the same constraints

and have felt free to make a large number of assertions. I have already explained why I cannot make public everything which would make it possible to discuss whether those assertions are true or false. In these circumstances, I must emphasise the central point. On the basis of all the material that was available to Ministers at the time, my colleagues and I were satisfied that we took the right decisions in order to protect the lives of our forces. Nothing that has since been put forward - and I can assure you that it has all been examined with the utmost care - has led me or any of my colleagues to have any doubts that we were right.

PRIME MINISTER

REPLY TO GEORGE FOULKES ON BELGRANO

I attach a reply to both of George Foulkes' letters.

The reply and the annex are expanded from the earlier draft (attached at A for ease of reference). It takes account of your comments and adds some more verbatim quotes. It contains new material in paragraphs 10 and 11 of the Annex, based on consultation with Admiral Fieldhouse. It deals in paragraph 13 with the additional allegations in last Saturday's Times. The figures for numbers in the Task Force have been checked and confirmed.

You will want to note particularly that in paragraph 11 of the annex we admit that Ministers were not informed of the Belgrano's change of course, and go on to explain the very good reasons why. I am sure this is right.

C.D.P.

18 September, 1984

"or any of my colleagues  
at end of para 3"

Could this be ~~finally~~ <sup>formally</sup> confirmed  
with Willie or John Knox - I know  
we agreed orally at meeting the other day  
but John could not have  
been present and I

and what?  
? - and what?  
What time  
Willie had fore by what time  
not sure whether Willie had fore by what time