



*file 10*

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

10 October 1984

THE BELGRANO

Thank you for your helpful letter of 10 October which usefully supplements our own records. You will, I am sure, clear with us in due course the line which you propose to take in dealing with any questions about these exchanges at Mr. Ponting's trial.

I am copying this letter to Henry Steel (Law Officers' Department).

CHARLES POWELL

Richard Mottram, Esq.,  
Ministry of Defence.

*CS*



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1  
Telephone 01-~~XXXXXX~~ 218 2111/3

MO 5/21

10th October 1984

*Pl. keep on  
file with our own  
pps. attached  
am*

*Amesbury.*THE BELGRANO

You telephoned me about references in today's papers to exchanges between Mr Stanley and No 10 Downing Street on the terms of the replies to Mr Dalyell about the sinking of the Belgrano.

There were three sets of exchanges about the handling of Mr Dalyell's questions:

- a. The first concerned Mr Dalyell's letter to the Prime Minister of 5th April following up her letter of 4th April to Mr Denzil Davies. The key documents here, as we discussed, are John Coles' letter to me of 6th April and Nick Evans' reply of 11th April. Incidentally, both Mr Ponting and Minister (AF) are recorded on internal minutes here as supporting the idea of a general reply to Mr Dalyell from the Prime Minister.
- b. In April there were discussions within the Ministry of Defence about the response to be made by the Defence Secretary to the separate letter he had received from Mr Dalyell on 19th March. I attach a copy of an internal minute here dated 13th April to me from PS/Minister (AF) which records a conversation between Mr Stanley and Mr Coles about the handling of these questions. The Secretary of State subsequently sent Mr Dalyell a reply on 18th April, which was copied to Mr Coles, referring back to the Prime Minister's letter to Mr Davies (further copy attached for ease of reference).
- c. Mr Dalyell returned to the charge at the beginning of May asking again for a reply to his original letter. Mr Ponting put up further advice dated 9th May, paragraph 2 of which reports a conversation between Mr Stanley and

C Powell Esq



/ No 10 Downing Street. I also attach for completeness  
a subsequent minute from Mr Stanley's office of 10th May  
and my reply of 11th May. Following this Mr Heseltine  
/ replied to Mr Dalyell on 14th May again declining to  
answer his original 9 questions (copy attached).

You will see that the accounts in today's newspapers are somewhat garbled in respect of these exchanges.

I might incidentally also add that I am seeking the advice of my Permanent Under Secretary about how I should respond to questions on these exchanges and others between Ministers and officials if I am questioned about them at Mr Ponting's trial.

I am copying this letter and the attachments to Henry Steel (Attorney General's Chambers).

*Yours etc,*

*R. C. Mottram*

(R C MOTTRAM)



MINISTER OF STATE FOR  
THE ARMED FORCES

LOOSE MINUTE

D/MIN(AF)/JS/5/1/5

13 April 1984

PS/S of S

Copy to:  
PS/US of S(AF)  
PS/PUS

BELGRANO

Reference: D/DS5/9/9/46-54 dated 12 April 1984

Minister(AF) does not agree with the draft reply to Tam Dalyell's letter of 19 March to S of S, attached to Head of DS5's minute of 12 April, because he feels that it is incompatible with the way in which the Prime Minister has just replied to a series of 11 related questions to her in his letter of 5 April.

2. Mr Stanley has discussed with John Coles today how we should deal with the 9 questions in Dalyell's letter of 19 March and he thinks - and John Coles agrees - that S of S should take basically the same line as in the Prime Minister's latest reply to Dalyell which effectively is on the military - not the diplomatic side - to rest on what the Prime Minister said to Denzil Davies in her letter of 4 April.

3. Minister(AF) has also discussed with John Coles how we would respond if Dalyell's 9 questions were either tabled as PQs or as a further letter from Denzil Davies on behalf of the Shadow Cabinet. The view he and John Coles both take is that we should wait and see until after next Monday's Panorama programme, and the Easter Recess, as to whether the Shadow Cabinet or Dalyell are going to run this issue before deciding whether to go any further than the Prime Minister's latest reply to Dalyell.

P M W FRANCIS  
PS/Minister(AF)  
MB 6113 6385 MB



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MO 5/21

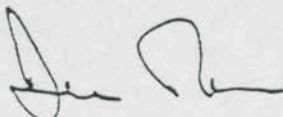
18th April 1984

Internals:

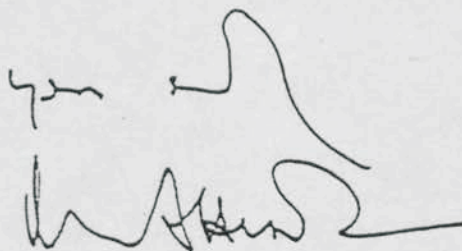
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Hd of DS5  
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DNW  
File: D/S of S/71/84

Copies:

Mr A J Coles, No 10  
Mr P F Ricketts, FCO



Thank you for your letter of 19th March asking some questions about the circumstances surrounding the sinking of the General Belgrano. Since you wrote this letter, you have seen the Prime Minister's letter to Denzil Davies of 4th April and you have yourself had a further round of correspondence in your letter of 5th April and the Prime Minister's reply of 12th April. There is nothing that I can usefully add.



Michael Heseltine

Tam Dalyell Esq MP



MINISTER OF STATE FOR  
THE ARMED FORCES

S/21

LOOSE MINUTE

D/MIN(AF)/JS/5/1/5

10 May 84

PS/S of S

Copy to:  
PS/US of S(AF)  
PS/PUS  
Sec/VCNS  
PUS/DUS(P)  
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AUS(NS)  
DNOT  
DNW  
Hd of DS5

BELGRANO

Reference:

- A. D/DS5/9/9/46 - 85 dated 9 May 84 (attached, not for copy addressees)

Minister(AF) disagrees with the advice in the attached Minute of 9 May from the Head of DS5. He believes that to reply as Head of DS5 has proposed would be in complete contradiction to

- a. The Prime Minister's letter of 12 April in reply to Mr Dalyell's of 5 April which asked a series of naval operational questions (for example, Question 6) and,
- b. the Secretary of State's letter of 18 April in reply to Mr Dalyell's of 19 March which did so similarly.

Both the Prime Minister and S of S relied basically by referring back to the Prime Minister's letter of 4 April to Denzil Davies.

2. The line Minister(AF) proposes is that contained in Paragraph 2 of APS/Minister(AF)'s minute of 9 May (attached) to Head of DS5. The Question to the Prime Minister asks for details of HMS CONQUEROR's "sonar stalk" of the BELGRANO and Mr Stanley personally has no difficulty whatsoever on operational grounds of declining to give this information. The text of the draft letter to Mr Dalyell, attached to Head of DS5's Minute, abundantly illustrates, in Minister(AF)'s view, the depth of the water Secretary of State would get into if he were to send it. He would be grateful for S of S's views before his departure this evening since we shall need to advise No 10 tomorrow of the draft reply to PQ 9143C.

*P M W Francis*  
P M W FRANCIS  
PS/Minister(AF)  
MB 6113 6385 MB



Copy to:  
PS/USofS (AF)  
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Sec/VCNS  
PS/DUS (P)  
PS/DUS (N)  
MA/DCDS (I)  
AUS (NS)  
DNOT  
DNW  
Hd of DS5

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no 5/21

11th May 1984

PS/Minister (AF)

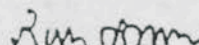
BELGRANO

The Secretary of State has seen your minute of 10th May together with that from Head of DS5 of 9th May.

2. The Secretary of State agrees with Minister (AF)'s view that we should not enter into a detailed point-by-point answer by letter to the questions which Mr Dalyell has raised. He intends instead to reply to Mr Dalyell's latest letter of 1st May broadly on the lines of the attached draft - I have yet to clear the precise words with him. The Secretary of State recognises that Mr Dalyell may yet table a series of detailed questions which he would propose to reply to by referring back to the account of the circumstances surrounding the sinking of the Belgrano which has already been given in the Prime Minister's letter.

3. As to the terms of the answer by the Prime Minister to PQ 9143C, the Secretary of State can see the difficulty raised by Head of DS5 over using explicitly the argument that it is not our practice to comment on military operational matters or the details of military operations. This is not entirely consistent with the Prime Minister's letter of 4th April to Mr Denzil Davies which provided further detail and said that ~~it~~ she felt able to do so now as, with the passage of time, those events have lost some of their original operational significance. The Secretary of State would prefer to reserve the argument that we could not reveal operational matters for those cases where it is the professional judgement of those concerned within the Department that there are genuine security objections to giving this information. He would, therefore, prefer to stick with the approach originally agreed with Minister (AF) and perhaps the answer might be the second sentence of the Minister's revised formulation that is:

"The circumstances leading to the sinking of the BELGRANO were described in my letter to the Rt Hon Member for Llanelli of 4th April."

  
(R C MOTTRAM)  
PS/S of S

RESTRICTED

DRAFT LETTER FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE TO MR TAM DALYELL

Thank you for your further letter of 1st May.

Your purpose in asking the questions you put to me is to pursue your campaign that the Belgrano was attacked in order to destroy the prospects for peace negotiations rather than for the military reason that she posed a threat to the Task Force. I do not believe that there is any point in prolonging this argument by a further round of detailed correspondence.





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MA/DCDS (I)  
DUS (NS)  
DNOT  
DNW  
Head of DS5

D/S of S/71/84

14 May 1984

Thank you for your further letter of 1st May.

Your purpose in asking the questions you put to me is to pursue your campaign that the Belgrano was attacked in order to destroy the prospects for peace negotiations rather than for the military reason that she posed a threat to the Task Force. I do not believe that there is any point in prolonging this argument by a further round of detailed correspondence.

Michael Heseltine

Tam Dalyell Esq MP

11 OCT 1984

11 12 1



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1  
Telephone 01 ~~XXXXXX~~ 218 2111/3

MO 5/21

11th April 1984

Dear Jim,

*ADL 11/4*  
*f.c.*

THE BELGRANO

In your letter of 6th April to Richard Mottram you suggested that the Prime Minister would not wish to answer the specific questions posed by Mr Dalyell in his letter of 5th April and suggested a general line which the Prime Minister might take at her Questions tomorrow. We here would be content with this. You also asked for material for supplementaries on the questions themselves in case the Prime Minister judged that it was appropriate to go into the detail. This is now attached: it has been cleared with Admiral Woodward. I gather that the FCO are separately submitting advice on Question 10 about reports of the Peruvian peace plan.

I am copying this letter to Peter Ricketts (FCO).

*Has not*  
*with form*

(N H R EVANS)

A J Coles Esq

Belgrano: Mr Dalyell's letter

original with  
able

You owe Mr Dalyell a reply to his letter of 5 April at Flag 'A'.

2/4

He has a Question on the Belgrano at No 5 tomorrow. We do not recommend that you reply before then since he will only exploit whatever you say.

But in case you take a different view I attach a reply. The FCO and MOD agree that you should not answer his letter in detail. Our objective must be to try to bring this controversy, such as it is, to an end as soon as possible.

You will recall that the Foreign Secretary is about to send Mr Dalyell a detailed reply to the eleven Questions which he posed during the Foreign Affairs Debate on 22 March.

We recommend that your Answer to Mr Dalyell's Oral Question tomorrow should follow the terms of the proposed letter from you to him, ie. there is no point in prolonging all these exchanges because his basic contention is simply not true.

We have commissioned answers to the detailed questions which he put in his letter of 5 April to you. These are at Flag 'B'. You will want to have these by you at Question Time in case you decide at the time that you must deal with a detailed Question.

A.J.C.

11 April 1984



10 DOWNING STREET

cc TF  
SS

original held by  
CPLs.

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.

Remembered  
R.D.  
1/3 am.  
1/2