



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
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MO 5/21

31st October 1984

*Dear Tim,*

You asked in your letter of 19th October addressed to Richard Mottram for advice and a draft reply to the further letter of 17th October from Mr George Foulkes MP.

My Secretary of State believes that it would be counter-productive to refuse to answer Mr Foulkes' questions. He would simply put them down as questions in the House of Commons, as his Parliamentary Questions already this session indicate.

The answers given to Mr Foulkes' first and last questions depend to a large extent on the Prime Minister's personal views as they arise from her own impromptu remarks.

I am copying this letter and the enclosed draft to Peter Ricketts (FCO), Henry Steel (Attorney General's office) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

*Yours sincerely,  
Benny Neale*

(B P NEALE)

T Flesher Esq



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DRAFT LETTER FROM PM TO MR GEORGE FOULKES MP

Thank you for your further letter of 17th October, and also for expressing sympathy for those who suffered as a result of the recent bomb outrage in Brighton.

You quote my reply to a supplementary question from Mr Dalyell on 21st February. As my reply to Mr Dalyell's original question made clear, I was referring to the reasons for the attack on the Belgrano. These were given on 4th May 1982 and explained more fully to the House of Commons on 29th November 1982; and reiterated many times since then. The question of the date on which Belgrano was detected was dealt with fully in my letter to <sup>Mr</sup> Denzil Davies <sup>Mf</sup> which was published in Hansard on 13th April. The MOD's reasons for declining Mr Gavshon's request for an interview with Admiral Woodward are, as you point out, recorded in Hansard.

I explained to you in my letter of 19th September that the decision to change the rules of engagement on 2nd May to permit attacks on Argentine warships outside the Total Exclusion Zone was taken on the basis of the clear and unequivocal indications that the Argentine Navy posed a real or direct threat to the Task Force and those sailing with it. If Belgrano had not been sunk on 2nd May she might have posed a threat in the future, but that is a hypothetical question. The decision to change the rules of engagement was based not on a potential future threat, but on a real and immediate threat.

My letter of 19th September also explained, once again, that the precise course and position of the Belgrano when she was attacked was irrelevant to the threat that she posed. At the time of the sinking, Belgrano's course was slightly north of west, while the Falkland Islands lay just east of north. She could have changed course at any time.

Argentina Returns.

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