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NOTE FOR PRESS OFFICERS

ASTIZ IN EXCHANGE FOR THE THREE JOURNALISTS?

LINE TO TAKE

On the record: There is no parallel between Lt. Cdr. Astiz on the one hand and the three British journalists on the other. The cases raise quite separate issues.

Unattributable: The British Government does not favour exchanges of this kind. To arrange such a swap in one case would place British subjects elsewhere at risk by encouraging régimes, whose nationals were for one reason or another in British custody, to arrest British subjects on trumped-up charges.

In this particular case, speculation about a swap runs the risk of encouraging the Argentine authorities to believe that the British Government has a particular relationship with these three journalists. This would not be in their interests.

Moreover the cases are different in kind. Lt. Cdr. Astiz is a prisoner of war and therefore covered by the Geneva Conventions. We are - for good reasons - determined to honour our obligations under these Conventions. We shall in any case be obliged to repatriate Astiz at the end of hostilities if not before - and the Argentine ~~line~~ know this.

The journalists are facing a criminal charge under the law of a sovereign state. In such circumstances we do all we can to extend them Consular protection. Through the Swiss, we have arranged for them to be visited in Ushuaia and we have asked (so far unsuccessfully) for them to be released on bail, for them to be transferred to Buenos Aires, and for the hearing of the case to be expedited. But in the last analysis we cannot interfere with

the due process of law in a foreign country any more than we would tolerate such interference in our own legal processes.

BACKGROUND

News at One on 1 June included an interview with the Deputy Foreign Editor of the Sunday Times <sup>who</sup> but speculated on the possibility of a swap for Astiz. We have no intention of pursuing such a swap and the idea may be construed in Argentina as confirming charges of espionage.

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