



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London S.W.1

1 May 1982

Stephen Charleton Esq
 DS 11 Duty Officer
 Defence Situation Centre
 MOD

Mr Wright

J.G. 2 1/5

Dear Charleton,

ATTACK ON ARGENTINE AIRCRAFT CARRIER

1. Further to my letter this morning, I now enclose a revised version of the draft statement. As you will see, we have somewhat modified the structure of the argument in order to reinforce our case that the warnings we have given so far were adequate to cover the aircraft carrier's operations in waters well outside the TEZ and at a considerable distance from British naval vessels. Our Legal Adviser suggests that this would be more helpful in pre-empting the criticism which we can expect.

2. As I pointed out in my earlier letter, this draft statement is of course entirely dependent on a decision not to issue a specific warning to the Argentines about the aircraft carrier. As you know, Mr Pym minuted the Prime Minister on this subject this morning. Subject to Ministerial views, we may have to modify the statement in order to adapt it to a situation in which a warning has been issued.

3. I spoke earlier to Philip Francis about this. I explained to him that I saw this draft as a supplement to a factual statement on the lines of the draft which you sent us this morning. I believe that we would do well to use this as soon as possible after the announcement of the engagement; if we do not, adverse criticism in the press could snowball.

Yours ever

D H Gillmore

D H Gillmore
 Emergency Unit

DRAFT STATEMENT FOLLOWING CRIPPLING OR SINKING OF
ARGENTINE AIRCRAFT CARRIER

(It is assumed the aircraft carrier will be crippled or sunk, without further warning, on the high seas outside the TEZ)

1. The United Kingdom is entitled, in the exercise of its inherent right of self-defence as recognised in Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, to take appropriate measures to protect its forces as well as its territory.
2. The Argentine carrier, the 25th May, when at large in the South Atlantic and operating within imminent striking range of our naval units, was a dangerous threat to those units - not only those in the TEZ itself but also to those in our vital sea lines of communication on which the Task Force is dependent.
3. On 23 April we gave a warning to the Argentine Government that any approach by Argentine warships or military aircraft which could amount to a threat to interfere with the mission of British forces in the South Atlantic would encounter the appropriate response. Subsequently, on 28 April, the Government declared a Total Exclusion Zone in the area of 200 nautical miles around the Falkland Islands.
4. The Argentine Government chose to ignore these warnings. On 29 April the Argentine Military Junta issued a communiqué declaring that it would treat as hostile all British shipping within 200 miles of the Argentine coast, and within a 200 mile radius of the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. Moreover, Argentine naval vessels, including the carrier, have been manoeuvring at sea for several days.

range of carrier-borne aircraft and their ability to launch stand-off weapons meant that the capacity of this carrier to make an effective strike against our units operated over a distance many times greater than in the case of an ordinary vessel. In addition, the speed and mobility of the carrier itself meant that it could, if it escaped surveillance even for a short period, bring itself within much closer launching range of our units without their having any effective warning. In these circumstances, the operation of the carrier at large in the area in which it was encountered in itself constituted a threat to our vessels of the kind against which they were warned in our notification of 23 April.

6. In the face of this threat, and of Argentina's declared intention to submit British forces to attack, the Government's duty was clear, as was its right to act as it did. We are entitled and obliged to protect the lives and safety of our officers and men on the Task Force, which is there in defence of our rights and our people in the Falkland Islands. We are not prepared to tolerate hostile actions by the Argentine forces directed against our legitimate response to the attempts by the Junta to perpetuate its armed aggression against the Falkland Islands while it continues the build-up of its forces there in flagrant defiance of Security Council Resolution 502.

7. The Junta should be in no doubt that we do not, and will not, shirk our responsibilities.

13 May

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