

LOSS OF MINUTE

D/DS11 10/6/5

PS/Secretary of State

Copy to:

AUS(D Staff)  
DS11 Duty Officer

*Handwritten signature/initials in blue ink, possibly 'SJS'.*

ATTACK ON THE "25TH OF MAY": PRESS STATEMENT

1. I attach two statements to be made to the Press in the event of an attack on the Argentine aircraft carrier "25TH OF MAY". The first is a short factual statement which would be issued as soon as we have confirmation that any attack has taken place. The second, prepared by the FCO, and cleared with the Attorney General, is intended to provide a more detailed justification of the attack, and would be used as soon as appropriate after the first announcement. As the FCO have pointed out, there would be advantage in not allowing the criticism which we may face taking hold in the media.

2. As you know, Mr Pym has minuted the Prime Minister on the possibility of issuing a warning of the attack and if Ministers agree, and there is time to issue this warning before an attack is made, we shall need to modify the texts of both statements. You will wish to send the attached to the Private Secretaries in No 10 and the FCO.

*7 yet me*

*Handwritten signature of P M W Francis.*

P M W FRANCIS  
DS11  
MB 9346 7446 MB

1st May 82

DRAFT PRESS RELEASE ON ATTACK ON "25TH MAY"

At approximately [time] the Argentine aircraft carrier "25TH MAY" was engaged by a British Submarine. The Argentine carrier is believed to be [severely damaged].

On 23 April, HMG made clear to the Argentine Government that any approach on the part of Argentine warships, including submarines, Naval auxiliaries, 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.

The Argentine carrier, with her embarked offensive aircraft, and her ability to launch long-range weapons posed a significant threat to the British Task Force. The action taken was fully in accordance with the instructions given to the Task Force Commander based on the inherent right of self defence under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.

Further details of the engagement will be given as soon as we have them.

FURTHER 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 potentially within 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. In addition, on 28 April the Government also 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 communique 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.

5. The range of carrier-borne aircraft and their ability to launch stand-off weapons mean 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 Falklands Islands.

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Woodward  
 F.I. Cannon  
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