

LOOSE MINUTE

D/DS11/10/6/7

24 August 1984

PS/2nd PUS

Copy to:  
APS/S of S  
PS/Minister(AF)  
DS5 (Miss Aldred)  
FCO, FID (Mr Palmer)

NEW STATESMAN ARTICLE - THE BELGRANO PAPERS

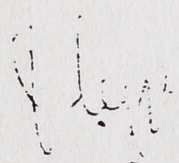
1. 2nd PUS asked me to set in hand a detailed critique of the various claims made in the Campbell/Rentoul article in the New Statesman of 24 August with particular reference to possible sources. This is attached; I am very grateful to Miss Aldred and Mr Darns of DS5 for undertaking some painstaking research in a very short time.
2. In summary there were five main claims:
  - (a) That the War Cabinet give the "order to attack" the 25 De Mayo on 30 April. The principal claim can be clearly derived from my minute of 6 July leaked to Mr Dalyell and reprinted in the New Statesman. The subsidiary claim relating to HMS Superb has appeared in the "Conqueror diary" and Gaveshon and Rice.
  - (b) That the Foreign Secretary and the Attorney-General jointly minuted opposing this decision. There was a minute, although signed only by Mr Pym (after consultation with Sir M Havers) and the contents is substantially distorted by the New Statesman. Mr Ponting drew particular attention to the Pym/Havers advice in his submission of 29 March.
  - (c) That the UK contemplated using Polaris in the conflict. This has been alleged by Mr Dalyell before; there is no foundation whatever in the claim, and it seems to bear no relation to the rest of the article.
  - (d) That the Argentine Navy was ordered to return to port on 1 May and that HMG knew this. This is also an old claim (by both Dalyell and Gaveshon and Rice) based on Argentinian sources.
  - (e) That there was a Cabinet Office paper on military options assessing likely casualties. This is the most difficult claim to track down. We have traced several papers dealing with military options, some of which mention possible casualties, but none exactly fit the description in the article. All are buried in the many voluminous files that were generated

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in April/May 1982, and none is an obvious candidate to be singled out from a mass of papers for the purposes of a leak. The information itself is not particularly sensitive: it is obvious that HMG must have been considering alternative military options at the time, and possible casualties would have been an important factor in those considerations.

3. Other than the two leaked documents there thus appear to be only three additional documents (or groups of documents) which might also have been leaked. One of these we can identify with certainty: the minute of 1 May from Mr Pym. Although the date is quoted accurately, the article is wrong in claiming it was signed by both Pym and Havers and in saying it recorded their dissent from the OD(SA) decision. It therefore seems most likely that an unauthorised reference has been made to the document, either orally or in writing (for example in the "third document" referred to by the New Statesman - the anonymous letter to Mr Dalyell) but that it has not itself been leaked. The second alleged group of documents, the telegrams to Washington about the deployment of Polaris to Ascension, we are confident do not exist. This leaves the military options paper discussing possible casualty rates. Unless our further researches identify a paper which exactly meets this specific description, it seems most likely that this claim is based on the (imperfect) recollections of someone involved at the time. Even if the document exists it seems unlikely to be in the possession of the New Statesman since the details given are very sketchy; one would expect them to make more capital out of the mass of material that would inevitably be included in a paper of this nature.

4. I will of course report further if our continuing researches on the "military options" document turn up anything of significance.

  
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Head of DS11  
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CLAIM	SOURCE	DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE IN MOD	REMARKS
<p>a. Two days before the Belgrano was sunk, the 'War of the Falklands' ordered an attack on the Argentine aircraft carrier and flagship ....</p>	<p>Head of DS11's minute of 6 July - engagement of the Argentine aircraft carrier outside the Total Exclusion Zone was permitted from 30 April.</p>	<p>Head of DS11's minute and a number of other documents referring to this change were widely available in MOD.</p>	<p>Adds nothing to leak of Head of DS11's minute.</p>
<p>b. But nuclear submarine HMS SPLENDID failed to find the aircraft carrier at the time ....</p>	<p>Conqueror diary given to Panorama confirms submarine involved would have been SPLENDID. Gavshon and Rice make same assumption.</p>	<p>Conqueror diary not available in MOD. SPLENDID Report of Proceedings and DS5 chronology of events surrounding sinking of Belgrano state that SPLENDID failed to find the carrier.</p>	<p>It was generally known in MOD that HMS SPLENDID had failed to find the carrier. Tim Dalyell had asked a letter of 5 April how the carrier had evaded SPLENDID. A draft Q&amp;A brief for use during PL question time that SPLENDID had failed to locate the carrier was rejected by Minister (Al) on the grounds that we had not previously confirmed that SPLENDID was the SSN involved. In the event, the Q&amp;A brief was not needed.</p>

The leaked documents do show that the Royal Navy was authorised on the part of the Belgrano to attack any Argentine ship; the order is not limited to warships allegedly preparing to attack the Task Force.

Head of DS11's minute of 6 July - "change of 2 May included all Argentine warships over a large area".

Could be inferred from Head of DS11's minute of 6 July.

As 1a above

As 1a above.

Only SSN's were given ROE's permitting attack.

STAFF	SOURCE	IN MOD	REFERENCES
<p>Foreign Secretary and Attorney General were both warned the Prime Minister that to attack the aircraft carrier without warning was likely to be contrary to the United Nations treaty and illegal under international law. The same arguments later applied to sinking the Belgrano. Their advice was disregarded ....</p> <p>Their dissent is recorded</p>	<p><i>Monday</i>  <del>Letter</del> from Mr Pym to Prime Minister dated 1 May 1982. Copied to S of S for Defence, Home Secretary, the Attorney General and to Sir Robert Armstrong. Letter says only "I have been giving a further thought to the line we should take in public after the event <u>of</u> attack without warning of the aircraft carrier... the way in which our action would have to be publically justified and its legality defended, I believe our position would be immeasurably strengthened if we had given a warning to the Argentine Government ...."  A draft warning was attached.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Chiefs of Staff, DUS(P), AUS(D Staff), Head of DS5, Head of DS11 and DSC all received copies from S of S's office. Document was more widely copied.</li> <li>2. Although there are indications that the letter from Mr Pym was discussed at OD(SA) on 2 May, there is no record of this in OD(SA) minutes and recommendation was not pursued.</li> </ol>	<p>Only Mr Pym signed the document "after discussion with the Attorney General". It was classified SECRET - UK Eyes A..</p> <p>Head of DS5's minute of 29 March to PS/S of S drew specific attention to this minute and described the issue as "politically and presentationally the most difficult area".</p> <p>This, together with the inaccurate interpretation</p>

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CLATE	SOURCE	DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE IN MOD	REMARKS
<p>(cont)</p> <p>a minute signed by          [redacted] and dated          [redacted] 1962. It warns the          that to attack the          [redacted] warship outside          a exclusion zone was          likely to be illegal.</p>			<p>the New Statesman puts          on the message from          Mr Tym, could mean that          the magazine does not          have a copy of the          letter and has only been          told of its existence.</p>

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CLAIM	SOURCE	DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE IN MOD	REMARKS
<p>Britain contemplated using Polaris nuclear missiles against Argentina. A Polaris submarine was sent to the South Atlantic to be ready for action 'if needed' ....</p> <p>The well placed political source has already revealed to Tam Dalyell that a Polaris submarine was sent to the South Atlantic .... which went as far south as Ascension ....</p> <p>The 'New Statesman' has been able to confirm that a Polaris submarine was indeed deployed to this position. Details of the deployment are given in a series of highly classified telegrams sent to the British Embassy in Washington.</p>	<p>Not known. Tam Dalyell has made this allegation before (Hansard 19 July 1983 Col 216, referring both to deployments south of Ascension and to Cordoba as a possible target).</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>There is no question of any official suggestion to deploy or divert a Polaris submarine to the South Atlantic.</p> <p>Deterrent patrols were conducted as normal during the period.</p> <p>(Source DNW Lt Cdr Foster)</p> <p>Neither the MOD, FCO or Cabinet Office can trace any such telegrams. Lord Lewin has stated there is no truth in the story.</p>

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CLAIM	SOURCE	CONFIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE IN MOD	REMARKS
<p>..... the Cabinet Office circulated another document assessing the likely cost in human lives for each military option in the Falklands War. In his Ministerial briefing to War planners laid out the likely costs in British lives and money of different military options. The course of action selected - which did not of course involve the use of nuclear weapons - was expected to produce a British casualty toll of 50-1000 dead - as against the 255 actually killed.</p>	<p>Several Chiefs of Staff and OD(SA) papers were prepared at about this time, some of which discussed possible casualties, but we have not so far identified any which fits this description.</p>	<p>COS papers were fairly widely distributed in MOD but OD(SA) papers were on a much more limited distribution.</p>	<p>Further investigations are being carried out to identify a paper meeting this description.</p>

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SOURCE

DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE  
IN MOD

REFERS

CLASS

(Evening of 1 May)  
11 Argentine Navy units  
ordered to break off and  
withdraw to port. The  
contents of the signal  
is, it is clear, known to  
the government and the  
task force.

Allegation made by  
Tan Dalzell and Gavshon  
and Rice.

See Head of DS5's minutes  
of 29 March 1984 (para-  
graphs 6 and 7).