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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

24 April 1982

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Dear John,

Argentine Reconnaissance Flights over the British Task Force

As you know, following two overflights of the main Task Force by Argentine military 707 reconnaissance aircraft, we asked the Swiss to warn the Argentine Government that any approach by its warships, submarines, naval auxiliaries or aircraft which amounted to a threat to interfere with the mission of the British Forces would encounter the appropriate response and that all Argentine aircraft, including civil aircraft, engaging in surveillance of these British Forces would be regarded as hostile and were liable to be dealt with accordingly. This warning was delivered in Buenos Aires at 1720 (local) yesterday evening.

Sir Anthony Parsons has now recommended that we should circulate the text of our warning in the United Nations. He fears that, if we do not do so, the Argentine Government will circulate the text themselves as "evidence" of our aggressive intentions.

The Secretary of State considers that we should proceed as Sir Anthony Parsons proposes and at the same time announce in London the fact of the warning given yesterday. If before we can do this, an incident occurs (eg over South Georgia, where the Force Commander already has discretion to shoot down Argentine reconnaissance aircraft) Mr Pym would be in favour of publishing the terms of the warning immediately, adding that it was conveyed formally to the Argentines before the incident in question took place.

On the separate question of whether we should now change the Rules of Engagement for the main Task Force in order to permit the shooting down of Argentine reconnaissance aircraft if warning shots failed to deter, Mr Pym's view is that we should wait to see whether yesterday's warning to the Argentines is sufficient to deter further surveillance flights. If this turns out not to be the case, Mr Pym hopes that Ministers can consider urgently whether to change the Rules of Engagement accordingly.

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I am copying this letter to David Omand (Ministry of Defence) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

*Yours ever,*

*Francis Richards*

(F N Richards)  
Private Secretary

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