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DEFENCE AND OVERSEA POLICY COMMITTEE

SUB-COMMITTEE ON THE SOUTH ATLANTIC AND
THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

NON-COMBAT AIRCRAFT

Note by the Secretaries

Attached for the consideration of the Sub-Committee is a Note by Ministry of Defence officials prepared following the Sub-Committee's discussion on 9 May.

Signed ROBERT ARMSTRONG
R L WADE-GERY
R L L FACER

Cabinet Office

10 May 1982

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RULES OF ENGAGEMENT: ARGENTINE NON-COMBAT AIRCRAFT

1. Since the Government's warning on 7 May that any Argentine warships or military aircraft which are found more than 12 nautical miles from the Argentine coast would be regarded as hostile, there has been no let up in flights by Argentine Boeing 707 aircraft which have been gathering intelligence on the Task Force and ships transiting out supply routes. In the last week there have been at least six recorded instances of such flights reported by the HMS ANTRIM group escorting the amphibious ships en route from Ascension.
2. The aircraft conducting this surveillance have adopted various flight patterns all of which have exhibited non-commercial behaviour by flying from Argentina, making various passes and approaches on ships of the Task Force and then returning to Argentina. The aircraft concerned have remained in the vicinity of UK units for significant periods, in one instance for over 70 minutes when the aircraft moved in from some 100 miles to within 10 miles of HMS ANTRIM before withdrawing.
3. There are several means of confirming the identification of an aircraft which has been demonstrating the characteristic flight patterns described above. Electronic Support Measures (ESM) equipment in our ships can detect and recognise aircraft radars. There is a high degree of confidence that information gathered through ESM will give a clear identification of an aircraft type. Because the Argentine Boeing 707 uses a normal commercial radar The Task Force Commander has advised that there

is no chance of confusion with the radar signatures of Soviet Bear D surveillance aircraft. ESM can also tell whether a radar is being used in a normal mode or not. For example the Argentine Boeing 707 has used its radar intermittently and in a narrow sector scan towards our units whereas civil aircraft normally expect to operate their radar continuously. By correlating the ESM data with the paths of radar contacts, our ships can therefore distinguish between civil aircraft flying on commercial routes and aircraft which are obviously carrying out surveillance of UK forces.

4. Some of the aircraft which the Argentines are using for military surveillance may be civilian aircraft taken over by the military authorities for such purposes. Despite this, there would be very little risk of confusing an airliner going about a civilian purpose with one of these surveillance flights.

5. There is little scope for one of our aircraft to intercept and positively identify the Argentine flights over our supply routes since our ships at present on these routes only have helicopters available. The RN has on one or two occasions been able to make a visual identification from the ships when the 707 aircraft have closed to 10 miles but this might not always be so convincing evidence as that obtained from radar tracks and ESM.

6. In the view of Commander-in-Chief Fleet, the use of IFF* interrogation on suspected surveillance aircraft by the ships of the Task Force is not conclusive. The Argentine 707 uses the same transponder code as civil air and in any case could use deception. We cannot therefore necessarily make a positive

identification of the aircraft and its purpose from direct interrogation.

7. The Chiefs of Staff are concerned that these surveillance flights are gaining much intelligence on the Task Force and its supply routes. There is also particular concern about the location of SANTIAGO DEL ESTERO, the second Argentine Guppy submarine which has not been located for some days since reported absent from Mar del Plata on 2 May. Any possible link between these surveillance flights and the activity of this submarine poses a distinct threat. Similar co-operation was noted with the SANTE FE before the repossession of South Georgia. The Chiefs of Staff have therefore requested that approval be given to treat any Argentine aircraft as a combat aircraft if it is identified by its radar characteristics, flight path, pattern of behaviour or visually to be an aircraft carrying out surveillance against UK forces. This would not be restricted to the Total Exclusion Zone. Action would then be taken in accordance with the ROEs in force at the time for combat aircraft.

8. The points of concern with such a policy would be the obviously embarrassing consequences which could result from misidentification. This could arise in two ways: either a commercial airliner making a legitimate flight or a surveillance aircraft of another country being mistaken for an Argentine aircraft. In the first case, there are five advisory routes for civil airlines across the South Atlantic which go through the possible combat zone. The airspace in this region is uncontrolled

and aircraft flying these advisory routes may deviate significantly from the published track depending upon the prevailing wind and weather conditions. However despite the presence and use of these routes there is only a very small risk that a mistake could be made in identifying these aircraft because the flight paths of the Argentine surveillance aircraft are so different from those of commercial ones.

9. The likelihood of the surveillance aircraft of another country being mistaken for an Argentine aircraft is also remote. The Soviet Bear D aircraft which our forces would be most likely to encounter have a very distinct radar signature and in most instances operate in pairs in the region of the Task Force and its supply routes. Other countries would be most unlikely to venture into the region to conduct military surveillance.

10. In the light of these considerations, Ministers are invited to:

a. Note that the Argentines have been intensifying their aerial intelligence gathering against the Task Force and its supply routes and that this is imposing an increasing threat to our operations.

b. Agree that any Argentine aircraft which is identified by at least its radar characteristics and flight path with any other supporting evidence from its behaviour or through visual identification may be treated as hostile.