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24MAY82 – FCO a N°10. Holmes a Ridley. Situación de los aviones no combatientes.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

24 May 1982

*N. S. I. R.**MDL 24/5**h.c.**Dear Jane,*Non-Combat Aircraft: Contingency Press Release

PT5. Your letter of 14 May to John Rhodes enclosed a further draft of your contingency press release in case we have to shoot down a non-combat aircraft.

I should like to repeat a comment we have made on earlier versions of this draft. In our view the reference to the Total Exclusion Zone in paragraph 3 of the draft is misleading and weakens the argument. We risk falling into the same trap which we laid for ourselves in the case of the "General Belgrano".

The point about the TEZ is that it is total. As far as Argentine forces are concerned there is an EZ (ie not covering civilian aircraft or merchant ships) throughout the South Atlantic. Any reference to the TEZ in a press release of this kind therefore risks giving the wrong impression. In particular, if the incident were to take place outside the TEZ, it would hardly be helpful to us to draw attention to the fact.

We also believe that the argument about the observed behaviour of the aircraft - while it might be persuasive to an RAF expert (and even perhaps to a specialist journalist) - may not be persuasive to the general public. It might sound like an excuse for having shot down a civilian airliner by mistake, which is of course what the Argentines may accuse us of having done.

/We therefore



We therefore hope that the whole of paragraph 3 could be omitted. The identification of the aircraft type (Boeing 707/C130) could be added to paragraph 1.

I am copying this letter to John Coles (10 Downing Street), David Wright (Cabinet Office) and John Rhodes (Department of Trade).

Yours ever
John Holmes

(J E Holmes)
Private Secretary

Miss J E Ridley
Ministry of Defence