

M. Butler

P



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Press Secretary

15 September 1982

Ian Neill,

DEFENCE COMMITTEE

You will be aware that the Defence Committee has invited me to give Written and Oral evidence on the handling of the media during the Falklands crisis.

The letter at Annex I from the Secretary sets out their areas of interest.

The attached paper has been prepared in the light of Millar's letter and my reading of the Written and Oral evidence to date (which, among other things, fills me with despair about the quality of contemporary journalism).

I have deliberately sought to present a largely factual account of No 10's role. But I have thought it right to preface that account with a brief but firm reference to the Government's policy objectives which conditioned and set the tone for the Information operation.

I am sure you will agree that it is right to put the onus on Departments - as a matter of fact and necessity and not out of any wish on my part to duck responsibility. I have of course come clean about the Departments/Offices represented on our co-ordinating group,

There is I fear no way of ducking the problem of co-ordination created by Sir Frank Cooper's oral evidence. The fact is my responsibility was and is to co-ordinate presentation at official level, and that is what I - and no doubt you - thought I was trying to do.

I hope however that my catalogue of our purposes as a co-ordinating group will help to clarify and possibly defuse what I think is an argument over semantics.

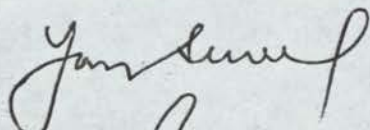
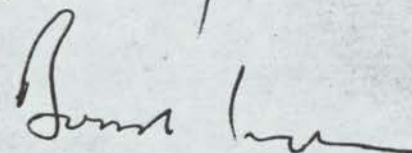
I hope that Ian McDonald will accept my account of editorial pressure for Task Force places is a fair and accurate one,

Finally, I hope no-one will deny me the liberty as distinct from the luxury of setting out the two views I reached very early in the crisis. We were all meat in the sandwich - some closer to mince than others - and I would like to create an opening to say something in defence of Press Officers - and about how the media can damage their own interests.

As for mechanics, I am asked to submit the Written Evidence by the end of September. In practice I shall not be able to do that because of the Far East trip. But I would like to get it through the Prime Minister and away to the Defence Committee by October 4.

Could I therefore ask all to whom this is copied for comments/ contributions to be with my secretary by close of play September 29?

You and John Goulden may care to clear with your Private Offices and you might let Clive Whitmore see a copy of these papers.

B. INGHAM

Neville Taylor, Esq.,
Chief of Public Relations,
Ministry of Defence.

cc Ian McDonald, MoD
Nick Fenn) FCO
John Goulden)
Ned Kelly, COI
Richard Hatfield, Cab
Off.
Brian Mower, No 10
John Coles, No 10

DRAFT EVIDENCE - NO 10 PRESS OFFICE TO DEFENCE COMMITTEE

The Government's objective during the crisis can be simply stated: to recover the Falkland Islands and the Dependencies by negotiation, if possible; but if necessary by force of arms, making every effort to minimise the loss of life.

This overall objective, and the recognition from the outset that the use of force might eventually become necessary, set the broad policy framework within which the Government Information Service (GIS) conducted its operations on behalf of Ministers.

The GIS, as a servant of policy, sought to help secure the Government's objectives in such a way as to preserve its integrity and longer-term effectiveness.

The task of informing the media and, through them the public, of developments in policy, measures and operations rests primarily with the responsible Department. Only that Department is equipped by background, expertise, flow of information and resources properly and fully to inform the media and public, taking account of all the circumstances,

The responsibility cannot be delegated to or assumed by another Department or by the Prime Minister's Press Office. But No 10 Press Office can and does assist individual Departments to get over their message. It did so during the Falklands crisis on the basis of information, and guidance on its presentation, supplied by the lead Department. In this case the two main sources of information were the FCO and MoD.

One of the tasks of the Chief Press Secretary to the Prime Minister is to co-ordinate at official level the presentation of Government policy and measures. In doing so he seeks to ensure that Departments are aware of wider considerations and events in making announcements or conducting information exercises.

During the Falklands crisis the main instrument of co-ordination was a daily meeting lasting some 30 minutes of representatives of the FCO, MoD, COI and Cabinet Office under the chairmanship of the Chief Press Secretary or his deputy. The purpose of the meetings was to take

stock of the campaign and its public presentation; to bring the Departments and Offices up-to-date with events; to anticipate, in so far as this was possible, events over the next 24 hours; to try to ensure that the Government spoke with one voice; and to agree on or make recommendations about the action required.

In addition, No 10 Press Office maintained hour by hour contact with those of Departments to keep abreast of events and developments and to secure guidance on the information to be disclosed and its presentation. Where possible, a No 10 Press Office representative attended Departmental press conferences or briefings.

The Chief Press Secretary and his staff brief a large number of journalists, both British and foreign, in the course of the normal day, both individually and in groups. The demand for group briefings greatly increased their frequency during the crisis. The prime sources of information presented and deployed in such briefings were the policy Departments - predominantly FCO and MoD. No 10 Press Office did not take the lead in making announcements about the progress of hostilities or the number of casualties whether at Bluff Cove or in any other operation.

After the decision to dispatch the Task Force the Chief Press Secretary came under heavy direct pressure from editors who believed they would not be represented on board to make more media places available. He urged MoD's Public Relations Division to:

- increase the small number of media places initially set aside; and to
- accredit to the Task Force a media team representative of press, radio and television.

The Chief Press Secretary also formed two views at this stage;

- the constraints on the number of media berths likely to be available, the heavy demand for places and the marked reluctance of individual newspaper groups (as distinct from BBC/ITN) to contemplate pooling even within their group presented MoD's PR Division with a thankless task; and that
- the GIS would do well to win friends during this campaign; it was likely to have to draw heavily on its capital.



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DEFENCE COMMITTEE

2 August 1982

Dea Whitmore,

In my letter of ~~29~~ July, I promised to give you further information about the Committee's interest in the role of the Press Office at 10 Downing Street during the Falkland Islands conflict.

In evidence the Committee have heard that the Chief Press Secretary gave briefings on the conflict to journalists; and also held meetings with Press Offices from other departments. In particular the Committee wish to know: (a) what role was played by the Chief Press Secretary in coordinating the Government information on the Falklands. The Ministry of Defence Memorandum indicates that, "During the Falkland Islands crisis the information effort was coordinated by the No. 10 Press Office"; and (b) what arrangements were made for liaison with departmental press officers, especially from the Ministry of Defence.

Two specific instances of the involvement of the Prime Minister's Press Office have been mentioned in evidence, on which the Committee would like the comments of the Chief Press Secretary. First, it has been mentioned that it was only after representations have been made to No. 10 that the number of journalists to be taken with the Task Force was enlarged. Second, it has been said that the first announcement of the number of casualties suffered at Bluff Cove came from No. 10 Downing Street.

The Committee will be examining further submissions made to them and the oral evidence given in due course and should any further matters come to light where the role of the Prime Minister's

Press Office is at issue, I will let you know in advance of Mr. Ingham's attendance before the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Douglas Millar

Douglas Millar
Clerk to the Committee

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10 Downing Street,
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