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24/9

Circular minute to
Selected Senior Officials

THE QUADRIPARTITE FORUM: RULES FOR HANDLING PAPERS

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1. My predecessor's attached circular minute, distributed in June, set out revised instructions for handling papers which refer to the Quadripartite Forum. The PUS is concerned at the number of recent breaches of these instructions, including one occasion on which a telegram was under-classified and given a very wide distribution.
 2. The need for secrecy is greater than ever. The Quadripartite forum is central to the management of the Western Alliance and the maintenance of Britain's role within it. Leaks jeopardise its existence and must be avoided at all costs. No recent leaks can be set at our door and this must remain the case. The PUS will take a serious view of any future breaches of the guidelines.
 3. I should be grateful if all those who see papers relating to the Quadripartite forum could be shown this minute and the attached rules for handling papers. One cause of the recent breaches may be that more and more people are hearing of the forum, but not by any means all of them are aware of how sensitive it is. Heads of Department should ensure that as few people as possible know of it, and that all those who do are properly briefed about it.

M H Jay

23 September 1982

M H Jay
PS/PUS

Circular minute to
Selected Senior Officials

QUADRIPARTITE MEETINGS: RULES FOR HANDLING PAPERS

1. Quadripartite meetings are held regularly between the Political Directors of the Foreign Ministries of the United Kingdom, France, the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States, and less frequently between their Foreign Ministers. In addition there are Quadripartite Meetings of economic directors from time to time, and occasional meetings on specialised subjects. These meetings are of great value in coordinating policies among the major allies. The Secretary of State and our three partners consider it essential that the existence of these meetings is kept secret, since leaks could cause considerable embarrassment with other allies, particularly Italy. As more people in the FCO, in overseas posts, and in Whitehall Departments become aware of and are involved in Quadripartite Meetings, the risk of leaks grows.

2. The purpose of this minute is to draw attention to the continuing need for secrecy, and at the same time to up-date the ground rules for handling papers so as to take account of the increasing range of subjects discussed in quadripartite meetings.

3. Please ensure that the following revised rules are scrupulously observed:

(a) Any papers which refer explicitly to Quadripartite meetings of Foreign Ministers, Political Directors, or any other Quadripartite Ministerial or senior official grouping, should be classified no lower than Secret: and should normally be registered only in Planning Staff. They should in addition always be marked 'BURNING BUSH'. The only exception to this rule are papers for the Four Power Ministerial Talks which are held on the eve of the twice-yearly NATO Ministerial Council Meetings and are devoted to questions which relate to Berlin and Germany as a whole: the existence of these meetings is well known and need not be concealed, and papers relating to them are normally graded Confidential.

(b) FCO Departments may keep copies of 'Burning Bush' papers relating to subjects with which they are currently dealing, but Heads of Department are responsible for ensuring that the 'need to know' principle is strictly applied. In departments whose subjects are frequently dealt with at Quadripartite meetings and who therefore have a constant need to refer frequently to 'Burning Bush' papers, exceptionally, in addition to the top copy which will be registered in Planning Staff, copies

may be registered in departments but must be kept in a separate file cover clearly marked 'Burning Bush'. There should be no reference to 'Burning Bush' papers in the main File Record sheets. All records relating to 'Burning Bush' should be kept separately and returned to Planning Staff for destruction, together with the file, when the papers are no longer needed. In other Departments whose dealings with Quadripartite meetings are less frequent, 'Burning Bush' papers should be kept in the Head of Department's own security press. Many 'Burning Bush' papers have been circulated recently and it would be useful if departments would now review the need to retain them. Any non-essential material should be returned to Planning Staff (Room W12A) for destruction.

(c) Our Embassies in Bonn, Paris, Rome and Washington, and also UKDEL NATO in Brussels, regularly receive 'Burning Bush' papers and are aware of the need for care in handling them. The need has arisen and will continue to arise from time to time for other Missions to receive papers, and in these cases it is the responsibility of the FCO Department concerned to make sure the need for secrecy is known, and the papers destroyed when no longer needed. If the Mission has not received such documents in the recent past a copy of this minute should accompany the document, or in the case of telegrams special handling instructions should precede or form part of the telegram. 'Burning Bush' documents should always be addressed Personal to the Head of Mission or his deputy and telegrams should in addition be DEDIP.

(d) 'Burning Bush' papers are sometimes sent to Number 10 and to senior officials in the Cabinet Office. Less often they will need to be sent also to other Whitehall Departments: certain officials in the Treasury, the MOD and the DOT are aware of Quadripartite Meetings. FCO departments should consult Planning Staff before sending 'Burning Bush' papers to other Departments, who must be told that papers should not be registered on departmental files but kept in the custody of a senior official and destroyed when no longer needed.

(e) The caveat 'Burning Bush' should never itself appear on an envelope: instead the classification SECRET AND PERSONAL should always be used.

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(f) In any papers likely to have more than a limited distribution, explicit reference to the Quadripartite forum should be avoided whenever possible so that the 'Burning Bush' classification need not be used. A reference to 'discussion with our closest allies' can often be used instead.

3. If you have any difficulties or questions about the application of these rules please consult Mr D G Manning (233 5605) or Mrs M E Blake-Pauley (233 3307) in Planning Staff.

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