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MR 13/10.

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ECONOMIC SUMMITS

This paper is written for the guidance of those responsible for organising the media side of the London Economic Summit next June. It is based upon my attendance at four Economic Summits - Venice, Ottawa, Versailles and Williamsburg.

The paper does not pretend to be an exhaustive checklist of dos and don'ts; the Chief Press Secretary is too far removed from much detail for that. Instead it offers an impression of what is required to make London successful from a media point of view.

Basic Facilities

It might be useful first to compare the basic media facilities at the four most recent Summits.

The Venice Summit was held on an island more or less opposite St. Mark's Square. It was thus isolated from the City proper and only those on Summit business were allowed on the island. This simplified media security.

The press centre was in out-buildings to the palace in which the Summit proper was held. The accommodation was spartan and the broadcasting facilities even more rudimentary. UK briefings were held in a relatively small room, frequently overcrowded but not stuffy since part of the audience looked in through open windows. Radio and tv interviews were conducted in a separate building to which the Prime Minister had to walk through the usual press of journalists.

I formed no impression of telephone facilities but do not recall many complaints.

The launch/gondola "taxis" were a constraint on late night briefings.

Ottawa was a two-centre Summit. The Heads of State and Government met in the largest log cabin in the world - an hotel - in the woods some 50 miles from Ottawa under massive security: one RCMP every few yards around the perimeter fence and swarms inside it.

The pool press centre was located outside the perimeter on the golf course and was fairly rudimentary. The three USA TV networks took over the local presbytery and statesmen queued outside to perform on breakfast TV.

The main media contingent was located in the Chateau Laurier Hotel in Ottawa, far from the action. The UK briefing room in the hotel was larger and far better appointed than that in Venice but scarcely adequate for the Prime Minister's final press conference.

Keeping the Ottawa media briefed was a nightmare. It was a battle to get a helicopter to and from Ottawa and sometimes not possible; when that occurred we had to brief down the line through a "squawk box" to a press conference presided over by the anchor press officer.

It was at this Summit that the ban on Heads of State or Government interviews or briefings during the Summit was formally agreed. It has since become a rule, broken only in the exceptional circumstances of the Prime Minister's early departure from Williamsburg because of the General Election.

The Prime Minister gave her UK radio and tv interviews at record speed in a small bedroom in the Chateau Laurier.

Ottawa gave me most trouble in media terms and is an example of how not to do it. Curiously, however, it may have been the ultimate in convenience for Heads of State and Government because all were living and meeting under one roof, no more than 30 seconds away from any bilateral or meeting they chose to have.

Versailles was an unhappy Summit for a variety of reasons. The media centre was in the Orangerie which had been partitioned off into briefing rooms. These were reasonably adequate in size but noisy. The small delegate office adjoining was impossibly stuffy but the only place in which restricted Ministerial briefings could be held; not surprisingly these did not work and generated disaffection among those who could not be admitted.

The media canteen in a tent offered standard and unvaried pate, salads, bread and cheese throughout the weekend and the environment was generally messy.

Security and transport were a shambles. Transport from the main delegation office to the press centre took the longest possible route (when the drivers knew it); and on one occasion the Foreign Secretary was left stranded on the wrong side of a gate while his officials unsuccessfully tried to persuade or browbeat the military into letting the party in.

The French chose to feature information technology and laid on an over-elaborate system which had a mixed reception from journalists. I did not however have any major complaints about telephone facilities.

As the final straw half the British delegation missed the helicopter taking them to the aircraft. They returned to London overnight by commercial flight in dinner jackets.

Williamsburg was the best organised of the four, even though the transport arrangements were too often faulty. If anything there was a tendency to over-elaborate. However, it achieved the ideal of secure isolation of the principals from the media who had a well-equipped press centre some miles away.

The UK briefing arrangements in the press centre were the best and most spacious of the four Summits and the media floor easily the most elaborately equipped with modern transmission technology.

The food was more than adequate, exceptionally varied and the tented restaurant facilities excellent.

This is the one to beat, if we were to set ourselves standards.

### Objectives

The Prime Minister's objective is to have a reflective, businesslike Summit devoted more to work than media ballyhoo.

This may not be easy to achieve, given the American way of presidential elections.

However, we have the right ingredients - a secure meeting place (Lancaster House); a photographic pool centre close by (Old Bath Club); and a separate self-contained press centre (Connaught Rooms).

Our overall objective should be to achieve media arrangements which are simple but satisfactory.

### Main considerations

On the basis of my experience of the last four Summits I count the following facilities crucial to a successful Summit in Press Secretary terms:

- a reasonably sound-proof national briefing room capable of accommodating upwards of 100 seated journalists with a dias, table and microphone for the briefers;
- an adjoining delegation office with telephones and office equipment which can be used for preparation and as a contact point;
- a media inquiry point in the national briefing room through which all contacts with the UK Press Secretariat are channelled;
- a simple, centrally controlled system in the press centre for informing the media when and where delegation briefings are to be held;
- systematic monitoring by press officers of briefings by other delegations;

- a quick, reliable method of transport for Press Secretaries from Summit to press centre and return; and one which preferably eliminates one of the worst Summit problems - finding your car;
- reliable and well-informed deputies for the briefers, who can cope with queries between briefings;
- adequate and sound-proof radio/tv studios which are close at hand for use by Ministers;
- basic refreshment for all participants - ie. wholesome food and drink. This in my view requires a reasonable variety of convenience foods and a plentiful supply of tea, coffee, soft drinks and possibly beer in the press centre. (It is reasonable to expect the media to eat and drink more elaborately outside);
- adequate information technology, telex and telephone facilities concentrated in the press centre, backed by effective maintenance.

Most of the above requirements would also be viewed as crucial by the media.

But what also matters to them is an inquiry point in the main hall serving the interests of each nationality/delegation represented and linked by telephone with the national briefing room inquiry point so that there is effective liaison.

This central point should also be backed up by a closed circuit tv system used to keep the media up-to-date with arrangements.

The general points to be borne in mind are to ensure that the media:

- know where to go to get basic information;
- have someone who knows what they are talking about to chat to them in the national briefing room.

I am not aware that the media were dissatisfied with the arrangements for them at any of the four previous Summits.

They will however tend (as usual) to judge us more rigorously than most countries because we are felt to be among the more competent administrators. Thus it will be important to do what we do efficiently, given that we cannot and do not intend to compete with the USA in material terms.

DETAIL

Against this background, I would make the following points of detail:

Host Briefing

As hosts we shall be expected to give the lead in briefing. Our responsibility will be to feed out accurate and reasonably objective information which, simply because we are hosts, may well be regarded as source material. It will therefore be important to brief regularly, comprehensively - ie. on each of the 3 Summits taking place at the same time - and simultaneously. It will also be necessary to cover early morning and late at night both as a host service and out of consideration for deadlines across the world. We shall also need one individual to be responsible for briefing on mechanics, nuts and bolts, programme, facilities and gossip etc.

It follows from this that the UK briefing room should be one of the larger available.

Size of Media Following

As hosts we can perhaps expect the largest contingent. But the USA and the Japanese will also be large and also technologically demanding.

Accreditation

Whatever the demands of security, we need to ensure that access to the press centre is confined to accredited media representatives - Summits are great free-loading occasions. We should try to minimise it - not simply if we succeed in persuading a private firm to supply free food and drink; but also to cut down infiltration by pressure groups and disruptive rebels whose aim is to attract publicity.

Access to Wire Services

Many journalists use agency copy as a basis for their stories and need to be aware in writing them of what is generally happening in the world. Ideally, they would be able to key into a TV screen. We need to give thought to how wire services can be made economically available.

Access to British Radio/TV

An innovation at Williamsburg was to play back repeatedly, and ultimately very boringly, news coverage during the Summit. I do not suggest we need that, but BBC/ITN might well be harnessed to provide TV sets in national briefing rooms and at strategic points elsewhere. Whether they might go further and provide a closed-circuit relay of individual national TV coverage in national briefing rooms might be explored.

Pre-conference Briefing

Well in advance of the Summit we need to conduct thorough logistical briefings for press (reporters and photographers); radio; and tv (reporters and photographers) who are resident in London. These briefings would no doubt attract the media of all countries represented. It is highly desirable we start with a degree of familiarity with the arrangements across all the participating nations.

Press Pack

Given the spread-out nature of events and facilities, we need to include in the press pack maps showing the principal sites; how they relate to each other; other major surrounding features of interest; and essential telephone numbers.

It might make sense to have in the press centre (and conceivably in the Old Bath Club) two large maps/diagrams showing:

1. the various locations; and
2. layout of press centre.

In addition it would be useful to highlight pubs and restaurants around the Connaught Rooms.

Extra Mural Facilities

In my experience media and officials are extremely busy from early morning until late at night on the Summit itself. Thus the opportunity to offer other facilities to 'sell' Britain should be taken before or later. I cannot honestly say, however, that I felt to be the subject of a hard tourist "sell" in any of the four previous locations, with the possible exception of Venice.

Thought might however be given to promoting the interests of London theatre/opera/music/museums/galleries with cut price offers immediately before, during and after the Summit. This might pay a long-term tourist dividend. So too might trips on the Thames. In Venice, for example, the Prime Minister visited a nearby historical island for breakfast; this and other trips laid on for the Prime Minister had the effect of promoting its longer term tourist interest among those who took part.

Press Room

My main concern here is that we do not miss out technologically. It was instructive to watch the different transmission practices of different nationalities of journalists. Whereas the British drafted their stories and then 'phoned them to their offices in London, the Americans were busy at the video screen. We must show off our information technology to advantage - and in sufficient quantity.

Satellite

It will be crucial to ensure that there are adequate facilities to cope with the demands of a much wider range of countries than the participants.

Pools

The effective organisation of pools for 3 centres (Heads of State and Government; Foreign Ministers; Finance Ministers) will depend on good liaison between:

- (i) the UK officials appointed as media liaison officers to each national group represented at the Summit;
- (ii) those responsible for pooling arrangements; and
- (iii) the press secretaries of each participating country.

Over and above the set piece pool film for the various Ministerial sessions there will be many bilaterals which politicians regard in some circumstances as even more important than the formal Summit photo calls.

My lasting impression is of hopelessly inflated pools. Is there no way of cutting them down? Smaller pools can, and do, produce better results.



Restricted Briefings

I am generally in favour of fairly isolated press centres. They concentrate the media and make for generally better informed and perhaps slightly less frenetic Summits because briefing is concentrated there. But by the same token they make for great difficulty in laying on restricted briefings. These difficulties became most acute in Versailles.

In practice this is not likely to be much of a problem for the UK because we have plenty of alternative venues close by. But we need to identify them well in advance. Nos 10, 11 and 12 Downing Street are likely to be out of the question.

Canada is the only other nation with central premises close to the action. It might be sensible to raise this need with each Embassy/High Commission at an early date.

At the time we are giving pre-conference press briefings we ought to put on one for representatives of the London posts of participating countries.

Entertainment/Gifts

There is a well established practice - in my case, Italy (Venetian glass); Canada (briefcase); France (writing case, among other things); and Williamsburg (wine taster) - of giving presents to members of delegations.

We need to give early consideration to this.

I recall that only Larry Speakes (USA) has offered entertainment for visiting spokesmen. It would be my intention to lay on a meal for visiting Chief Press Secretaries to Heads of State or Government, perhaps in association with the Lobby. Mr Goulden and Mr Hall will wish to consider whether they should do anything for their opposite numbers and, if so, whether separately or the three or us collectively.

Competing Events/Anniversaries etc

We need to establish the nature of any competing events or anniversaries around the time of the Summit to see whether they might be relevant in PR/promotional terms, whether to the principals or media. The 40th anniversary of D-Day immediately precedes the intended dates.

Pictures

We need to decide what "image" we wish to send across the world. This in essence means giving thought to the setting for the reception of Heads of State and Government and delegates and the kind of informal shots we permit. Ideas will be conditioned by the venue for receiving delegations and the kind of social life provided.

Downing Street

Most of the action will be at Lancaster House, but we shall need to consider the press and physical arrangements required in Downing Street and in the L-shaped road if bilaterals and other events are held in Nos 10 and 11 or at the FCO.

Will scaffolding be required in Downing Street? Should arrangements be made for doorstep microphones outside Nos 10, 11 and FCO à la White House Lawn occasions?

Banqueting Hall

Every effort is made on these occasions - and at CHOGMs - to provide an attractive backcloth to the final press conference - flags, motif etc. There is also something to be said for introducing each participant in the closing event.

Simultaneous translation is of course necessary for the audience and radio and tv.

Consideration also needs to be given to the settings for the Summit meetings - ie. Heads of State and Government, Foreign Ministers and Finance Ministers.

Motif/Logo

This is relevant not merely to the setting for the final press conference but also for the whole of the literature/briefing material produced in connection with the Summit. Should we go further and grant franchises to manufacturers to produce souvenirs, using the Summit logo - eg. books of matches, biros, medals (Cancun), T-shirts (as at Cancun), canvas shopping bags (as at Williamsburg)? One condition of the franchise might be that a certain number of items is produced free for press packs, delegations etc.

Build Up

Summits these days are such elaborate affairs and attract such a large media circus that we need to give careful thought to presentation of the build up. This has been the catalyst for "knocking" stories in the past.

We need to face the fact that just as CHOGM Closed Half of Greater Melbourne in 1981, so the London Summit will severely interfere with traffic in Central London in the morning and evening rush hours and at other times.

Some of the security will be massively obtrusive by our standards. And some leaders will be hamming it up for all they are worth.

The cost will appear to be huge for apparently little tangible return.

We need to try to control the pre-publicity and to turn it to positive account where we can - eg. souvenir industry, promotion of tourism, value of Summits, how we are minimising cost eg. by sponsorship, franchises. This argues for early Ministerial decisions on the extent to which commercialisation is to be harnessed and given free rein. Unless it is, we may be regarded as unnecessarily austere, not to say skinflint.

Diary/Social

Summits generate a big social gossip column and women's page interest. We ought to cater for this and make a specific press officer responsible for handling it. For example, the media have an insatiable appetite for among other things, menus, wines, dress, decorations, chefs, toasts, who sat next to whom etc.

We shall need to liaise with Buckingham Palace.

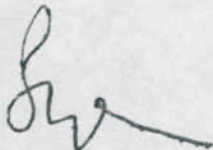
Substance

All this, of course, ignores the purpose of the Summit - the substance of discussions and the briefing on it. We need to give separate consideration to this nearer the time, but it is essential to build in opportunities for more de-briefing of Press Secretaries than is usual. We are hosts on this occasion and we need to set the right tone and present the right, informed image.

Summary

I hope these thoughts are helpful. They distil out of my experience of Summits what is required within reason to make for a media success in London. We shall, I fear, be considered Scrooge-like unless we exploit the commercial interest.

You may care to discuss with the Liaison Group.



BERNARD INGHAM  
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