

RESTRICTED



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MO 6/17/15/1S

31st December 1990

Dear Patrick,

G/S
Any comment
on the enclosed PPS?
C.D.P.?
3/1

see system
G/S

GULF CRISIS: MEDIA HANDLING

Thank you for your letter of 17th December, suggesting that it might be desirable to draw the attention of the media to the provisions of the Official Secrets Act 1989.

We have given careful thought to the most effective way of securing media co-operation in the event of hostilities, with a view to ensuring particularly that no information is published which prejudices the success of military operations. As I explained in my paper for OPD(G) our approach has been based on the conclusions which the Government reached in the light of the Beach report on censorship which was commissioned after the Falklands conflict. There are two strands to this. In theatre, journalists attached to our forces will be given accreditation as war correspondents: in return they will be expected to conform to a set of reporting ground rules (attached at Annex A) and to submit their copy for clearance before release. In all other cases no form of censorship will be applied, but editors will be provided with extensive written guidance (Annex B) identifying the subjects on which information should not be published without consulting the Ministry of Defence.

Rt Hon Sir Patrick Mayhew QC MP
Attorney General

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The guiding principle behind this approach is voluntary co-operation, in effect an extension of the D-Notice System. The sanction of the Official Secrets Act clearly remains available in the event of offences falling within it; and editors are likely to be well aware of this. But given the delicacy of our relationship with the media, the importance of securing their co-operation and our decision to seek this through voluntary means, I believe it would appear a little heavy-handed to draw their attention to the Act in this context. May we keep your idea in reserve for now?

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Prime Minister, to other members of OPD(G), to Sir Percy Cradock and to Sir Robin Butler.

Tom King

MEDIA GROUND RULES

THE GROUND RULES BELOW WILL PROTECT THE SECURITY AND THE SAFETY OF THE TROOPS INVOLVED WHILE ALLOWING YOU REASONABLE FREEDOM AND ACCESS IN COVERING YOUR STORY.

1. No specific locations should be used when filing stories although the general geographic area is permissible e.g. From the southern Arabian Gulf, eastern Saudi Arabia.
2. You must remain with your military escort at all times, until released, and follow your instruction. This is necessary to facilitate troop movement, ensure your own safety and protect operational security.
3. Except where already released by MOD, Military Command or Joint Information Bureau, information on the following subjects should not be published without consulting MOD or in theatre Public Relations Staff:
 - a. Number of troops.
 - b. Number of ships and aircraft.
 - c. Numbers regarding other equipment e.g. Artillery, tanks, radars, vehicles, water.
 - d. Names of military installations or specific locations of UK or Allied military units.
 - e. Information regarding future operations.
 - f. Information concerning security precautions at military installations.
 - g. Photography that would show level of security at military installations.
 - h. Photography that would reveal the name of specific location of military forces or installations.
 - i. Rules of engagement details.
 - j. Information on intelligence collection activities including targets, methods and results.
 - k. Information on current operations against hostile targets.
 - l. Information on special forces and their operational techniques.
 - m. Operational techniques of regular forces.

- n. Information identifying postponed or cancelled operations.
 - o. Information covered by additional specific guidelines in the case of operational necessity in order to protect tactical security.
 - p. Embargoed information until expiry of the embargo.
4. The following categories of information are releasable:
- a. Arrival of major units in theatre when officially announced. Mode of travel (sea or air) and date of departure from home station.
 - b. Approximate friendly force strength figures announced by UK/Allied spokesman.
 - c. Approximate friendly casualty and POW figures for each action or operation.
 - d. Approximate enemy casualty and POW figures for each action or operation.
 - e. Non-sensitive unclassified information regarding UK air, ground and sea operations (past and present).
 - f. Friendly force size in action or operation will be announced using general terms. Specific force/unit identification/designation may be released when it has become public knowledge and no longer warrants security protection.
 - g. Identification and location of military targets and objectives previously under attack.
 - h. Generic origin of air operations such as "land" or "carrier based."
 - i. Date/time/location of previous conventional operations and actions as well as results.
 - j. Types of ordnance expended will be released in general terms rather than specific amounts.
 - k. Number of aerial combat or reconnaissance missions flown in theatre or operational area.
 - l. Type of forces involved (infantry, armour, air, defence, naval task group).
 - m. Weather and climate conditions.
 - n. Allied participation by type (ships, aircraft, ground units etc) in an operation after approval of host nation government.
 - o. Conventional operation nicknames.

p. Names and hometowns of military units and individuals may be released but note casualty reporting restrictions below.

CASUALTY REPORTING

5. Casualty reporting is an area of particular concern and, while it is appreciated that circumstances in Saudi Arabia may allow rapid coverage of operations or incidents/accidents leading to casualties, information on the following should not be published without prior consultation, unless it has been officially released or is already within the public domain:

- a. Any loss or damage to, or attack upon any naval vessel or military aircraft.
- b. The extent of casualties sustained by particular military units or formations.
- c. Names of casualties (until they have appeared in official casualty lists), or information as to the units or geographical area in which they were serving.
- d. Identifiable pictures of casualties unless the casualties have been named in an official casualty list.
- e. The nature and extent of any damage to military capability.

MEDIA EQUIPMENT

6. Media must carry and individuals (the media) are responsible for any personal and professional equipment they take with them including protective cases for cameras, batteries, cables and converters.

CONCLUSION

7. If in doubt about the Ground Rules consult your escort officer or Public Relations staff in the Joint Information Bureau before releasing your story.

MOD GUIDANCE ON THE RELEASE OF INFORMATION1. Military Operations

There is an obvious danger that publication of authoritative information about the operations, current and/or future, of British or Allied forces could unwittingly jeopardise their success. Similarly, information about other preparations relevant to operations - for example the location and movement of units; logistic activity; command appointments - could give the enemy vital clues. Less obviously, considerable care is needed in the reporting of matters which might give an indication of the ability to sustain current operations. Publicly-aired speculation about future operations, particularly where it gives the appearance of being well-informed or authoritative, also carries the risk of causing an actual or potential enemy to consider possibilities that otherwise might not have occurred to him.

Therefore, information on the following subjects should not be published, except where it has been released for publication by the MOD or allied authorities or the MOD has been consulted:

- i. Current, future or prospective military (i.e. naval, land or air) operations of British or Allied forces;

- ii. current operational orders;
- iii. the logistic and other support of current or future military operations
- iv. the current or planned location, composition and functions of military units (including ships);
- v. manpower and unit/formation movements related to current or planned operations, including new appointments to senior operational command - i.e. at and above the level of RN Captain, Colonel, Group Captain;
- vi. current or projected operational tactics and techniques (including camouflage and other deceptive measures)

2. Military Equipment and Capabilities

Release of classified information about current capabilities, whether in terms of equipment quantities and effectiveness or of the state of training units, could allow the enemy to use his resources to the best effect and to exploit any weaknesses. It is requested therefore that information in the following categories, that has not previously been officially released, should not be published without consultation with MOD.

- i. Specific quantities of military equipment (Naval, land or air) currently in service or reserve;
- ii. munition stockpile quantities;
- iii. actual or planned deliveries of new military equipment and munitions, orders placed and rates of production.

- iv. design details, technical specifications, materials, production methods and code names and numbers of military equipment and munitions;
- v. equipment performance and operational capabilities, shortcomings and possible counter-measures;
- vi. plans for modifying existing equipment and developing new equipment and munitions, and details of the technology involved;
- vii. details and specifications of physical protection and defensive measures at military headquarters and other establishments;
- ix. state of readiness and detailed operational capability of individual military units and formations;
- x. military manpower totals and training organisation throughput.

This guidance applies to both Allied and to British forces' equipment and capabilities.

3. Military Losses and Casualties

It will often be desirable to give as much information as the operational situation permits, as early as possible, to counter rumour and speculation which might portray a situation far worse than it actually is. Nevertheless, there is a danger that specific information about ship or aircraft losses, or about the extent of damage to fighting units, could be of advantage to an

enemy, either by disclosing weaknesses that might otherwise be unrealised or by confirming what was otherwise uncertain. Related to this, the naming of units sustaining casualties may yield useful information about unit locations and roles. Furthermore, distress can be caused to relatives by the disclosure of losses and casualties before official casualty lists are available and next-of-kin have been informed. Unless it has been officially released, editors are requested therefore not to publish information on the following without having first consulted the MOD:

- i. Any loss, damage to, or attack upon any naval vessel or military aircraft;
- ii. The extent of casualties sustained by particular military units or formations;
- iii. Names of casualties (until they have appeared in official casualty lists), or information as to the units or geographical area in which casualties were serving;
- iv. Identifiable pictures of casualties, until enquiries have established with reasonable certainty that the individuals concerned have been named in an official casualty list;
- v. The nature and extent of any damage (including casualties) to defence establishments or installations in the UK or overseas, whether due to enemy action or accident. Particular care should be taken in the case of establishments in the UK over the disclosure of

additional information gleaned from local civil sources.

4. Command, Control and Communications

Information about military organisation, the nature and siting of military facilities and headquarters, and communications links

and capabilities may be valuable in enabling an enemy to piece together command structures and to identify the most attractive targets for attack. Disclosure of details connected with military communications technology may give important clues to encryption and coding. Information in the categories below, that has not previously been officially released, should not be published without consultation with the MOD.

- i. The organisation of the Armed Services or the Ministry of Defence;
- ii. The location, functions and size of British or Allied military headquarters (including possible military war headquarters) and other defence and military establishments;
- iii. Information about the nature, extent and routing of communications links between the MOD, military headquarters and other defence establishments, and military units (including ships);
- iv. Information related to the means by the UK or Allied Governments to preserve the security of transmitted

material, including all details of encryption and encoding practices and technology in use in Government and military communications;

- v. Details of any call-signs or messages passed through military communications channels.

5. Intelligence and Information about the enemy

While it is obviously necessary not to reveal the activities, and particularly the successes and failures, of the Security and Intelligence Services in connection with operations against Iraq both in the UK and Overseas, it is also necessary to avoid giving credence to enemy propaganda, constraints on the publication of information or speculation about enemy plans, operations and capabilities have several objectives. Useful indicators of deficiencies in enemy planning or equipment may be revealed inadvertently and it is important that the enemy should not receive any information as to the success or otherwise of operations undertaken by special forces infiltrated into the UK or into the countries of its allies. The judgement as to what might be damaging is a difficult one and the guidance of the MOD should be sought prior to the publication of any material about the activities of British (and Allied) Security and Intelligence Services, or about enemy plans, operations or capabilities. Areas which are likely to be particularly sensitive are:

- i. Activities of GCHQ and of the Security and Intelligence Services either in UK to counter Iraqi activities or overseas;
- ii Operations of enemy ground forces;

- iii. Details of enemy air attacks;
- iv. Details of enemy casualties or of numbers captured;
- v. Details of the activities, interrogation, control, movement, location or identity of enemy prisoners of war or internees in the UK or elsewhere;
- vi. Speculation about possible methods of attack, on any scale, on the UK or its allies.

