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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

7 June, 1982

Dear David,

Press Requests to Visit the Falkland Islands after Cessation of
the Hostilities

We are beginning to receive requests, particularly from American journalists and others who have resented being omitted from the press group with the Task Force, for visits to the Falkland Islands after hostilities there cease. About a thousand overseas journalists attended the Zimbabwe independence celebrations in 1980. The liberation of the Falklands is likely to generate at least the same level of interest and we may be faced with a rush reaching the proportions of a second 'invasion'. This has already been discussed with MOD officials.

We have a good story to tell. There are disadvantages either in preventing an influx altogether or adopting a laissez-faire attitude. We therefore suggest that good facilities be provided for 80 or so key journalists. Though this would lead to objections from those not chosen, we could partly meet these by undertaking to let them in by stages as the first group leave (it will probably be a 3-day wonder for some). Our information policy interests would best be served by carefully selecting representatives of the world's most influential media. Preference might be given to the USA, Latin America, the Developed West and third world countries with Falklands interests (eg Security Council members). Our prime aim should be to counter any propaganda campaign the Argentines might mount following defeat. About 25% of the new places might be reserved for the British press (this should suffice given that the 28 British pressmen with the Task Force have so far had exclusive coverage). One way to spread the jam widely would be to favour single reporters and to encourage TV companies and others who need teams to pool resources.

I understand that the Stanley airstrip would need at least 10 days to be repaired. Sending a ship from Montevideo (4 days travel) might be quicker. Temporary accommodation could then be provided on that ship or another vessel moored at Port Stanley. Radio telephone links would have to be established, including equipment for transmitting photos and if at all possible film. In effect we would have to provide a package tour (on a repayment basis) involving transport, briefing, escorting and organised departure. It should be made clear in advance that journalists arriving without accreditation would have to be sent home because facilities are limited.

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There will be staffing implications both in London and in the Falklands. In London a small office would be needed to deal with applications from others to go on later tours. You could perhaps handle this in general, but we would of course be best placed to decide which overseas journalists should be chosen. In the Falklands themselves MOD should take the lead given the likelihood that our armed forces will be in charge of day to day operations for some considerable time after a ceasefire. Extra press officers would presumably need to be sent out temporarily from MOD and FCO.

It would probably make sense to allow the journalists in as soon as practicable after the main Stanley garrison has surrendered. It will be hard to withstand media pressure if there are only small pockets of resistance left, eg on West Falkland. If the Argentines continue long range hostilities from the mainland, eg by air attacks on our ships, the timing will be largely a matter of judgement about military security. It may then be necessary to provide the journalists with protected air or sea transport from, say, Uruguay.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries of the other members of ODSA, Sir Robert Armstrong and to Sir Michael Palliser.

Yours ever

(J E Holmes)
Private Secretary

David Omand Esq
PS/Secretary of State for Defence

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