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MR POWELL

c Mr Woolley

House of Commons Defence Committee Report on
Implementing the Lessons of the Falklands Campaign:
Government Response

with CDP?

In his minute of 24 September, the Defence Secretary invites comments on the draft Government response to the recent report by the House of Commons Defence Committee on "Implementing the Lessons of the Falklands Campaign".

2. The report covered a great deal of ground, much of it detailed, and in order to deal systematically with the points made the draft response itself is necessarily on the long side and full of detail. The tone is generally positive - in only a few instances have the Committee's recommendations been rejected - and the draft succeeds in conveying the impression that the lessons of the Falklands Campaign have been taken to heart and actively applied where appropriate and possible. But in order to gain this general impression the reader has to work through a long parade of paragraphs about particular points. It would improve the presentation if the draft could begin with a reiteration of the Government's general approach, i.e. that it has taken the lessons of the Falklands very seriously and continues to implement them energetically.

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3. The Defence Secretary draws attention to the Committee's familiar scepticism, reflected throughout the report, about the ability of the Defence budget to fund the future programme. The draft response deals with this point on the final page, referring the reader to this year's Defence White Paper (which says that difficult choices will have to be made between relative priorities in our forward plans) but draws attention to the increase in Defence expenditure between 1978-79 and 1985-86 and the benefits that have resulted. As the Defence Secretary says, the Committee are unlikely to let this matter rest, but the draft response deals adequately with it for the present.

4. I suggest that the Prime Minister can agree to the draft response, subject to the views of her Cabinet colleagues to the presentational suggestion above. (We shall take up separately with the Ministry of Defence our views on a number of drafting points and the elimination of jargon, as we do with the annual White Paper.)

C L G Mallaby

28 September 1987