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PERMANENT UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE

20.5.82

DUS(P)

SW/82/730  
9/31/F

H H Mills Esq  
Paymaster-General's Office  
Privy Council Office  
Whitehall  
London SW1A 2AT

19 May 1982

Dear Mills

FALKLANDS: PUBLIC PRESENTATION

Sir Frank Cooper thought that Mr Parkinson (and those attending his meeting this afternoon) might find it useful to see the attached notes on MOD's current approach to public presentation on the Falkland Islands.

Copies go to the recipients of your minute of 18 May.

Yours sincerely

*S Webb*

S WEBB

Private Secretary

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## FALKLANDS PR POLICY

Attachment to  
50/82/730  
of 19 May 82

Some Key Points

1. Whatever the PR or diplomatic penalties, information must not be given which would endanger British forces or reduce their effectiveness. This may mean either complete restrictions (eg on certain force level and technical information) or restrictions for a period of time (eg until the operational situation has changed).
  2. We must invariably tell the truth, correct errors we have made and avoid deliberately misleading the media (even if we sometimes conceal certain points). Credibility is our greatest advantage over the Argentines, who have proved themselves suspect to the media.
  3. We should strive to announce incidents before the Argentines do so. This:
    - a. Immediately gives us the "high ground" in PR terms - and makes Argentine distortions less likely to stick (since they appear a reaction to what we have said, rather than an objective report).
    - b. Reassures opinion at home and abroad that the Government in London is controlling British forces - and is pursuing a controlled and purposeful policy.
- On balance it is better to make a thin announcement early (particularly before the Argentines) than a fuller one later.
4. We must continue to make some initial reports on the record (and live to camera) since this is the best way of ensuring that our statements are repeated accurately worldwide.
  5. We must increase the volume of PR material released - particularly on operations. The coverage we receive is directly proportional to the output we produce. The capacity of the worldwide media organisations will be filled somehow and, if not by us, then by the Argentine or ill-informed lay commentators. Our brief initial reports should be followed up by greater detail and "colour". This may take the form of:
    - a. Reports by correspondents with the Task Force, which have a valuable bonus of implicit independent corroboration.
    - b. Where we cannot give further detail "on-the-record" we must provide background briefings. The UK Defence correspondents have shown they can be trusted with confidences.
  6. We need to increase our coverage in the world's press. Briefings for foreign correspondents in London have an important role to play here, but we must also ensure that FCO posts abroad can play a more active role in explaining events and policy.
  7. MOD PR needs to be set more closely in the diplomatic framework. All our announcements and briefings should show (either directly or implicitly) that military operations are being deliberately undertaken in support of broader Government objectives and, especially, to reach a solution with the minimum use of force.

8. We should not be afraid to announce bad news in the same way as good news. Only if there are genuine security reasons - which there often will be - should we conceal losses or delay their announcement. The Argentines will frequently be able to announce them and, if they do so before us, will be able to exaggerate and distort. The Press will respect us for revealing bad news and this will give them greater confidence in reporting our good news. Domestically it is reassuring to the public - and to the families of Servicemen in particular - to be confident that matters are no worse than we say. (Rumour of unannounced losses is particularly depressing to national morale). Internationally, our acceptance of losses is seen as a sign of steadiness and determination.

The Secretary of State has been rationing his time very carefully because of the constantly changing diplomatic background and, I imagine, because many of the sessions have been too short to enable the Secretary of State to put over a complex situation.

3. There was also outstanding a bid from Nationwide.  
4. I think the Secretary of State should consider very carefully the request from World This Week Ltd. It is a programme which for some time has been asking for the Secretary of State. The programme is not a bad one, I think, by the quality of the material which has certainly been saying to us. It is a programme which has been asked to appear on any BBC programme and has appeared on Week-End World.

The Press Secretary has also strongly urged the Secretary of State should consider going on air this Sunday for the purpose of ensuring that they cannot use to our advantage a claim that repeated requests for the Secretary of State have been rejected.

The Editor of Panorama has been asking for a follow-up programme with the Secretary of State that it is going to be in the near future.

Should the Secretary of State be given 15-20 minutes of material. The actual programme is not at the moment being discussed.