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LOOSE MINUTE

PS/Minister (AF)

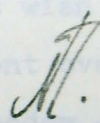
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DEFENCE DEBATE

As requested in your minute of 24 June (and later amended by telecon PS/CPR) I attach a draft background note on the overall, general issues of PR handling of the Falklands crisis.



25 June 1982

Neville Taylor
CPR

DRAFT BACKGROUND NOTE

DEFENCE DEBATE: FALKLANDS INFORMATION ISSUES

1. Throughout the Falklands operations we have been accused of giving too much information and at the same time - sometimes by the same critics - accused of giving too little.
2. A total of 28 reporters, radio and television correspondents, photographers and cameramen were embarked in ships of the Task Force. They filed more than 500 individual despatches which were sent to all national newspapers and broadcasting organisations on a pooled basis. More than 1 million words were communicated in the first eight weeks of the operations.
3. There were many complaints from the media about the slowness of communications and the degree of restriction on operational detail in stories.
4. It is fully appreciated that reporters wish to report. Therefore, there is bound to be friction and resentment over any restrictions which are put in the way of the media's freedom - as they see it - to have immediate access to the means of communicating events as and when they happen. In a series of discussions with the editors of national newspapers, representatives of the provincial press organisations and with the editors and controllers of radio and television, there was a general understanding that operational security throughout the Falklands conflict must be the overriding consideration for the handling of public information from the Ministry of Defence.
5. Much has been made of the alleged "reluctance" of the Ministry of Defence to "allow" live television pictures to be transmitted from the Task Force. To a certain extent there was also criticism in the early stages of the operations about the absence of newspaper photographs as well.
6. There were difficulties to begin with over the transmission of still-photographs. This was a problem of having the necessary picture

transmitters on the right ships, in the right place, alongside the embarked photographers. Once the transmitters, the photographers and the appropriate ships had been brought together we were able to begin transmission of photographs and these have been used throughout the world. As to television, it proved technically impossible to transmit live television pictures despite the combined efforts of BBC and ITN engineers and our own research scientists - all of whom worked together in an attempt to bend the rules of science to enable transmission to be effected. At one stage considerable progress was made in simulating in test conditions the transmission of black and white moving pictures, but without the ability to transmit sound. It was not possible to conduct further trials outside the research establishments without endangering the operation of military communications. The basic problem with the transmission of television pictures from the South Atlantic is that a large stable aerial is required to send electronic news-gathering film. By its very nature a ship does not provide a stable aerial and the BBC and ITN were unwilling to invest a very considerable amount of money which would have been required to purchase and transport the necessary transmitting equipment to the Falkland Islands once we had established ourselves ashore.

7. We have benefitted very greatly from the presence of journalists, photographers and cameramen with our forces. Their reports have, in the main, brought a graphic account of the success of the operations. Many of the broadcast reports and the written despatches of correspondents have been examples in the highest standards of journalism.

8. Efforts are being made to arrange for foreign journalists to visit the Falklands by means of flights from Ascension Island to Port Stanley [once the airfield is open/now that the airfield is open].