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From the Secretary of the Cabinet: Sir Robert Armstrong KCB, CVO

Ref. A09126

28th July, 1982

My dear Frank,

Ian Trethowan called on me last week to make his farewell call as Director General of the BBC.

During the course of our conversation we had a brief and inconclusive discussion of the exchange of letters which I had had with him about the "Falkland Islands Special" programme on the intelligence aspects of the South Atlantic war. He said that the BBC had taken my letter very seriously, but thought that the charge of "shocking irresponsibility" was unjustified. Everything that had been said about access to Argentine communications was already in the public domain; and Alan Protheroe had spoken to Bill Ash about the involvement of Chile.

I said that it remained my view that the programme has been irresponsible. It simply was not enough for the BBC to say that it could reproduce anything that had been published anywhere else in the world. What they were doing was giving infinitely wider dissemination to material which in its original form might have reached only comparatively few people, and giving it the cachet of the BBC. For various reasons I could not produce chapter and verse, but we knew that the programme had been seen and studied by Argentinians who had not previously been aware of its contents. This could mean that in future we might lose access to some material to which we had until now had access. Experience showed that it was one thing for people to believe in theory that their communications were vulnerable; it was quite another, and their behaviour would be different, if they knew for a fact that it was happening.

We did not take the matter any further than that, and Ian Trethowan suggested that, if we wanted to pursue the general matter further, we should talk to his successor after the summer holiday. Perhaps we could have a word some time as to whether we want to follow that up.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Antony Acland.

Yours ever  
Robert

Sir Frank Cooper, GCB, CMG

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