Nov '83
last Paper 8/12/83
PA 21/1/84.

Prime Minister
CDP
19/1

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B.06933

PRIME MINISTER

c Sir Robert Armstrong

Beach Report on the Protection of Military Information
(OD(84) 19) attached

BACKGROUND

The note by officials circulated under OD(84)19 reports on the implications of implementing the recommendations of the Study Group on the control of military information which was set up under the chairmanship of General Sir Hugh Beach in the wake of the Falklands campaign. It is now twelve months since the Beach Report was presented to Parliament as Cmnd. 9112. Proposals on the Government response to the Beach recommendations were made last May by the Ministry of Defence after consideration by the Chiefs of Staff, and inter-departmental agreement was reached among officials in July on the proposals to be made to Ministers. The Ministry of Defence considered at that stage that the Defence Press and Broadcasting Committee (DPBC), which is composed of both Government and Press/Broadcasting representatives, should be consulted before the matter was brought to OD. The Defence Secretary agreed in December that, subject to the inclusion of certain amendments proposed by the DPBC, the note by officials, now circulated under OD(84)19, could go forward for consideration by OD.

2. The main Beach recommendations, summarised in paragraph 7 of the note by officials, fall under the two headings of censorship to be applied in limited conflicts and censorship in general war. The note proposes acceptance of the former, but does not believe that the implementation of the Beach recommendations, as they apply to general war, would be a practicable proposition because of the resources required and

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because we could not persuade NATO Allies to pursue the same course. A draft White Paper setting out a public response by the Government on these lines is proposed at Annex A to the note.

3. The Minister of State, HM Treasury (Mr Hayhoe) will represent the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the meeting. The Home Secretary and the Chief of the Defence Staff have been invited to attend. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will not be represented at the meeting.

HANDLING

4. You should invite the Secretary of State for Defence to open the discussion. The Home Secretary should be asked to give his views on whether the proposed home censorship measures are both acceptable and capable of being put into action. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary should be invited to advise on the likely reaction of our NATO partners and the Minister of State, HM Treasury on resource aspects. You may wish to structure discussion to cover the following principal issues -

(a) The extent of censorship to be applied in limited conflicts

As the note by officials indicates, the proposed censorship of Servicemen's correspondence has not been applied since Suez. Furthermore, such censorship and the accreditation system proposed for journalists could have considerable resource implications. The Defence Secretary should advise on the need for the censorship of Servicemen's correspondence in limited war and on his Department's ability to absorb the cost of what is proposed.

(b) The extent of censorship to be applied in general war

With field censorship remaining broadly as proposed for limited war, the most important recommendation under this heading is that concerning home censorship. Beach proposes

that a system on the lines of that used in the last war should be planned in peace time and implemented in any future general war but the note by officials argues that this is not a practicable proposition. Are the changes in the nature of society generally and of the media in particular since the Second World War so great as to make it no longer possible to enclose the country in the sort of "information net" which was maintained in the 1940s? You should invite the views of the Home Secretary and the Defence Secretary. Is the alternative home censorship scheme favoured in the note by officials (a system of strengthened advice to the home media in consultation with the DPBC) a credible solution? Is the DPBC likely to agree to play the role required of it in sponsoring guidance to the media? Will it be possible to provide the required 50-100 well-trained high-calibre staff, available at seven days' notice, to give the continuous service of guidance and interpretation to those journalists who seek it? The Defence Secretary should advise, with the Minister of State, HM Treasury being invited to comment on resource considerations.

(c) Likely NATO reactions to what is proposed

Beach recognised that the attitude of our NATO partners would substantially affect the efficiency of United Kingdom censorship in general war. Are our NATO Allies likely to be willing to adopt similar plans to those proposed? The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary should be invited to advise.

(d) Proposed publication of a Command Paper

The draft White Paper in its present form commits the Government to acceptance of a number of censorship proposals which could have significant resource implications. Is it sensible to accept this degree of commitment without a clearer picture of the costs? Should the Beach recommen-

dations (xvii and xxxii) which relate to the future role of the DPBC be formally accepted as proposed, before the consultation with that Committee is complete? The Defence Secretary should advise on these issues and on the timing of publication. Given the elapse of time since the Beach Report was published as a Command Paper in December 1983, there is obvious merit in publishing the proposed response as quickly as the need to inform NATO authorities permits.

CONCLUSION

5. You could guide the Committee, subject to discussion, to agree the recommendations of the note by officials and to agree a timetable for informing NATO authorities and for the publication of the proposed Command Paper.

Bryan Cartledge

B G Cartledge

17 January 1985

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DEPARTMENT OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY
1-19 VICTORIA STREET
LONDON SW1H 0ET
TELEPHONE DIRECT LINE 01-215 5422
SWITCHBOARD 01-215 7877

JU849
Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

18 January 1985

CDP 21/1

Charles Powell Esq
Private Secretary to the
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1

Dear Charles,

BEACH REPORT ON THE PROTECTION OF MILITARY INFORMATION

I am afraid that other commitments mean that my Secretary of State will not be able to attend the meeting on Monday 21 January, when this paper is to be discussed. There is really little that he would wish to contribute in discussion of the paper, with which he is broadly content. If you agree, he would not therefore propose to be represented at the meeting.

Copies of this letter go to the private secretaries of members of OD and to John Wiggins in the Cabinet Office.

Yours ever

Colin

M C McCARTHY
Private Secretary

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