

Secretary of State

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FALKLANDS - PRESS HANDLING

1. I held a meeting this morning to consider whether, and if so how, we should institute censorship arrangements to deal with the output from the journalists (including TV and radio) accompanying the Task Force, and possibly from the media in the United Kingdom.

2. Our conclusions were:

a. We need to exercise tight control over matters which could jeopardise the success of any potential operations or put lives at risk - obvious examples are:

(1) details of operational plans or too much speculation about them;

(2) details of operational capability;

(3) information about intelligence, especially in the field of communications;

(4) information about the location of units

b. Information of anything resembling censorship would be very badly received by the media and run counter to the assumptions on which House Defence Planning has been based in recent years;

c. Nevertheless the media would in general respect the force of the points at a. above if they were properly explained to them;

d. Moreover the accredited journalists with the Task Force must in consequence accept a considerable measure of control by the chain of military command and we have a considerable measure of control over their means of communication;

e. Therefore we should not set up any system of censorship of their dispatches but:

(1) MOD should take early action to give a briefing to editors or their senior representatives which would also make very clear to them the principles upon which we expect the media to operate and invite their understanding and support - PUS would be prepared to run this, with appropriate professional backing, as soon as to-morrow evening and might also cover the point about armchair strategists concerning which the Prime Minister has expressed anxiety to the Home Secretary;

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(2) we should, building on a. above, draw up a statement of principles which would serve as guidelines both for the media and for senior officers of the Task Force in regulating the access of journalists to information and, if absolutely necessary, insisting on deletions from their copy;

(3) we should issue instructions to our own people, both in the Ministry and the Task Force, setting out the broad principles of co-operation with the media and, while not discouraging contact, making very clear that no classified information may be divulged - it will be also necessary to cover, for example, the need for security in private communications from members of the Task Force to their families.

3. Action is being put in hand on e.(2) above, from which e.(3) can follow. Your early approval to e.(1) is invited.

JPA

6 Apr 82

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