

LOOSE MINUTE

D/DPR/14/26

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DAILY PRESS BRIEFINGS

1. Ever since we announced the task force the defence correspondents have been looking for material for their copy and, within the necessarily very limited areas on which we could talk, we have through the normal channels - mainly by telephone from the press desks - been supplying them with information. The task force has a number of correspondents aboard and they are now starting to send back their own stories. Following the Debate today we can expect that the defence correspondents in London will remain voracious for any titbits of news and will be more than ever likely to turn towards gossip and speculation for their stories, particularly during the period when the task force is moving into the area and not much is happening operationally. It will be very important indeed to keep in close contact with the defence correspondents over that period both to give them all the information we can and - more importantly - to guide them away from their wilder excesses.

2. Accordingly I believe it very important that I should hold a daily non-attributable briefing for the defence correspondents. I have suggested to the FCO that they might wish to join with me in a combined press briefing each day. This would mean that in much the same way as the 'twin-track' philosophy we could cover diplomatic and military moves in the same briefing, and would have the advantage of ensuring that the FCO briefing and the MOD briefing were absolutely consistent one with the other. FCO were attracted to the idea but have not yet been able to give me a final reply. Probably more often than not I shall have nothing new to say on the military front, since I will not be able to give any sensitive information at all and will certainly not be able to talk about the location of the task force, its intentions or the options open to us. I know, however, that the defence correspondents would welcome a regular opportunity to make contact with me in this developing situation even though I might not be able to give them anything new in the way of information. I would of course endeavour to lay on innocuous but interesting general items to keep their interest up - for example a short talk from someone who has been in the Falkland Islands, the concept and equipment of refuelling at sea, etc.

3. I should be grateful therefore if you would seek S of S's agreement to my giving a daily press unattributable briefing to the defence correspondents; (perhaps accompanied by the FCO Press Officer

/to speak ...

to speak on the diplomatic side with an audience increased to include the diplomatic correspondents). I believe the best time for such a briefing is probably in the early afternoon, a little while after the daily FCO briefing is complete.

I. S. McDonald

I. S. McDONALD
Acting CPR

7 Apr 82