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Reference R/6666 /8002/10/1

25 May 1982

230414

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K4 Z1 SUKLO (2) for information - copy/copies to each

R for information - to see on file

THE FALKLANDS: SUNDAY TIMES INSIGHT ARTICLES 23 MAY 1982

1. The following comments are offered on the various Insight articles on the Falkland Islands in the Sunday Times on 23 May 1982.

2. Revelations regarding Sigint operations and successes, probably the most potentially damaging ever seen, included the following:

a. a report of British intelligence information, based largely on the interception of radio messages, saying that the Argentinians had taken elaborate precautions, since their initial invasion of the Falklands, to guard against sudden attack, deploying units of 100 men or more to watch over every conceivable landing site on East Falkland;

b. apparently verbatim quotations from intercepted (and presumably decrypted) messages between the Argentinian forces on the Falklands and the mainland, intercepted by Washington; one said that in the past week 125 men had influenza, 43 suffered from homesickness, 6-7 from shell-shock, and 10 from dislocated bones; another referred to an appalling shortage of clothing, with none of the troops having a change of dry clothing; another, asking for a detailed list of spares for radars and various air defence associated weapons, suggested that supplies were still getting in from the mainland;

c. the Sunday Times obtained from New York a copy of the Argentinian peace proposals submitted to the Secretary-General of the United Nations; these proposals were not officially promulgated by the UN, and could have come from Sigint sources;

d. reports that communications between the Falklands and mainland Argentina could have been jammed by the British Task Force, but that this would have deprived the British of vital information from their intercept; GCHQ was reported to have paid special attention to the Falklands, and was said to be well pleased last week by the amount and nature of the messages it was intercepting; some of the messages indicated a desperate need for spare parts for weaponry, especially for the Rhein Metall gun; one message from the mainland instructed the garrison commander to send back faulty radar parts for repair.

3. Reporting of this nature is totally irresponsible and displays a complete disregard of D Notice No 6 by the Editor of the Sunday Times. He cannot plead ignorance on this matter, as the now D Notices have only recently been issued. I have spoken to Admiral Ash, the Secretary of the D Notice Committee, who is aware of the article, and have told him that we regard the article as very damaging. He is willing to visit the Editor, but will wait for the reaction from the JIC meeting of 24 May 1982.

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4. The revelations in the Insight articles contain references to and extracts from Category III Comint, the unauthorised disclosure of which risks exceptionally grave damage to national interests. In this case the national interests include not only Sigint activities but also military operations by the British Task Force and British lives, both of which could be jeopardised if the revelations resulted in an increased COMSEC awareness by the Argentinians and a consequent denial to us of vital intelligence. This point should be put forcibly to the Editor of the Sunday Times, and it would do no harm for it to be brought to the attention of the entire British media, many members of which have been guilty of similar, but lesser, indiscretions.

5. It would probably be ineffective to attempt to trace the source of the leaks; there are very many people who would know of the information quoted, and the journalists could not be expected to reveal their sources. It seems likely, however, that the information in paragraph 2.b above originated in Washington. (It is noted that Mark Hosenball is listed as one of the Washington contributors). The information in paragraph 2.d, however, is more likely to have originated in the UK.

6. It is inconceivable that the Editor of the Sunday Times would be completely unaware of the serious effect that the publication of such material might have. It is a case, therefore, of putting good copy before the national interest, which is irresponsible at best and treasonable at worst. Nothing can repair the damage already done, but there should be a suitably worded warning, or threat, to the media from the Secretary DPBC to try to avoid any repetitions. I also recommend that our legal adviser should be asked to comment on the possibility of pursuing action under the Official Secrets against the Sunday Times.

7. The gist of these comments have been passed to the GCHQ Liaison Officer in MOD and to Z (via K4) prior to his attendance at the JIC meeting of 24 May 1982. I understand that K4 can identify several of the reports referred to in the Insight articles. I suggest that he identifies as many of the intercepted messages as possible and issues a more detailed damage assessment based on their contents.

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