

Frcm: Lieutenant-Colonel the Lord Burnham.

Beaconsfield 3315

HALL BARN
BEACONSFIELD
BUCKS.

16th November 1982

Dear Prime Minister,

The Falklands Enquiry

I understand the enquiry is basically to determine why no adequate warning was received of the Argentine invasion, or if one was received why it was disregarded. I am writing to you because I believe that my experience of the Cabinet Office intelligence machinery, though acquired in the mid 1960s, may have some relevance.

Between 1964 and 1966 I served on the Joint Intelligence Staff in the Cabinet Office. When I joined the JIS was found from the Foreign Office, Commonwealth Office and the three Services - though during my time it was joined by members from MI6, MI5 and GCHQ. We had access to all Government departments and to all sources of intelligence. Our duty was to produce intelligence assessments for the Joint Intelligence Committee, which were then distributed by the Secretary to the JIC to Ministers on a larger or smaller distribution. When a paper had reached final draft form we presented it to the JIC. On occasion the JIC required changes in emphasis, but generally speaking our conclusions were accepted.

In practice we divided ourselves into teams, each dealing with a different part of the world. In the course of preparing a paper individual members of the JIS as appropriate would consult the sections concerned in the various ministries, and in the various intelligence-gathering organisations. At that time we regarded ourselves as representatives rather than delegates of our own Ministries. Although our individual attitudes generally reflected our origin we did not feel in any way bound slavishly to put forward the views of the department from which we came. Indeed from time to time our respective ministries expressed disappointment at the conclusions of the Joint Intelligence Committee.

Throughout my service in the JIS I had a strong impression that the policy of the Foreign Office was to rid this country of as many overseas commitments as possible, without much regard for strategic considerations or for the welfare of the populations concerned. However policy is no concern of intelligence assessors, and personal relations between members of the JIS were excellent. All problems were discussed objectively and often at great length, and though it was usually obvious that the Foreign Office had more trust in the goodwill of foreign leaders and independence parties than the representatives of the Services this was not always reflected in conclusions of the JIC. Following hours of most interesting and valuable discussion, I believe that we came up in most cases with the correct assessment. We were certainly proud of our record.

However shortly after I left the Joint Intelligence Staff it was reorganised and the Service representatives were recalled to their various departments and ceased to work in the Cabinet Office. It was said that they would be called in when needed or could submit the views of the Ministry of Defence in writing. I believe they were seldom called in, and the fact that they were no longer on the spot when drafts were being prepared meant that it was no longer possible to put forward a controversial view at an early stage in the drafting process. I felt sufficiently strongly about this to write to the Director General of Intelligence, but I was by then serving in another branch of the Defence Intelligence Staff and my letter was not acknowledged. I retired in 1968, and since then have no knowledge of how the Cabinet Office Intelligence organisation works.

It is however my conviction that, as a result of reorganisation which in my view was initiated by the Foreign Office in order to get rid of tiresome opposition to their own ideas, the Government has since been less well served with intelligence assessments.

Governments have of course from time to time chosen to disregard the best intelligence assessment that could be provided. A classic example was when Mr Harold Wilson stated in a speech that economic sanctions on Rhodesia would have an effect within weeks rather than months. This was some 48 hours after he had been advised by the JIC that economic sanctions were not likely to have any appreciable effect for 10 years. I have of course no idea whether something like this happened in the case of the Falklands.

I would be grateful if my comments could be passed for what they are worth to the members of the Enquiry.

Yours sincerely,

R. Sullivan

The Prime Minister,
10 Downing Street,
London SW1.

cc Rawsthorne H
Falklands Review
ARGENTINA.

23 November 1982

The Prime Minister has asked me to thank you for your letter of 16 November which, as you requested, I have passed to the Secretary to the Falklands Review, under the Chairmanship of Lord Franks.

Tim Flesher

Lieutenant-Colonel The Lord Burnham

ls