



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
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ec BI 2

MO 21/8/17

Prime Minister:

I have consulted Bernard Ingham who is content with the reply although we both take the view that it is slightly bureaucratic in tone. Agree to its publication?

3rd February 1983

Prime Minister x

Dear John,

DF 7/2

Yes not

Dr 4/2

The House of Commons Defence Committee published its First Report 1982-83 on the Handling of Press and Public Information during the Falklands conflict on 16th December 1982. The Secretary of State proposes to publish the Government Observations as a Command Paper on 2nd March 1983. I am attaching the text of the Observations for the Prime Minister's information.

I understand that paragraph 11 of the Observations, concerning co-ordination between Departments, has been agreed with the Prime Minister's Press Secretary during the process of drafting.

I am copying this letter to Bernard Ingham, to David Heyhoe (Lord President's Office) and to Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever,

Gene Ridley
(J E RIDLEY) (MISS)

A J Coles Esq



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

8 February 1983

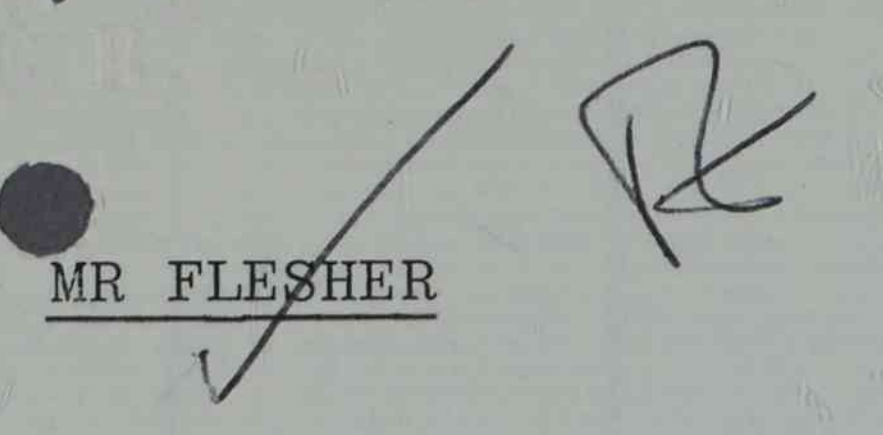
Thank you for your letter of 3 February enclosing a copy of the draft of the Government Observations on the Defence Select Committee's Report. The Prime Minister has noted both the draft and the arrangements which your Secretary of State proposes to make for its publication. I understand that Mr. Ingham will be in touch with you to suggest a number of textual amendments.

I am sending a copy of this letter to David Heyhoe (Lord President's Office) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Timothy Flesher

Miss Jane Ridley,
Ministry of Defence.

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MR FLESHER

Falklands papers:
MoD draft to Sir W

17

REPLY TO DEFENCE COMMITTEE

The draft reply sent by MoD is a succinct if somewhat bureaucratic reply to the Defence Committee's report. I doubt whether it is worth the effort to achieve a less stilted style.

My substantive comments are as follows:

On page 2: I think we should distance ourselves a bit further from misinformation and redraft the first sentence of page 2 to read:

"Such a policy may have short term attractions, but would inevitably"

On Page 2: I would like to strengthen the last sentence of para. 3 to read:

"It will continue to regard the latter as quite separate, acceptable and necessary when justified by operational requirements."

On page 4: We need to answer the point in the very last (XXViii) conclusion of the Defence Committee in its Summary about competition between the Services. Thus I would like to redraft the last two sentences of para. 9 to read:

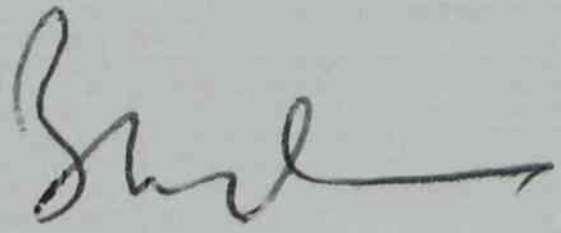
"The Ministry also agrees that it is absolutely essential that there should be the closest relationship and unity of purpose between the Chief of Public Relations and his three Service directors. This has, in fact, been a guiding principle of the unified organisation for many years."

Page 5, middle of para. 12: I do not like the words "satisfy the clamour of the media for total openness". I would much prefer to be brutally frank and honest and say:

"..... it will rarely be possible in an operational situation to satisfy the media."

Page 6, para. 14: I would hope we could inject a greater sense of urgency by using the words "is being" instead of "will be" in relation to attention to media studies as part of higher defence training and how increased awareness of the needs of the media can be encouraged.

Finally, to reduce wordage, we could usefully eliminate "situation" at the end of the first sentence of para. 2; edit a sentence in the middle of para. 4 to read at the start: "It is only in the light of such particular factors that decisions"; and in the middle of para. 10 to edit a sentence to read: "This considerable task is being progressed as quickly as possible, but it will not be practicable to complete it as early as Easter 1983."



B. INGHAM

7 February 1983

FIRST REPORT FROM THE DEFENCE COMMITTEE 1982-83

HC 17-I-II

THE HANDLING OF PRESS AND PUBLIC INFORMATION DURING THE
FALKLANDS CONFLICT

Observations presented by the Secretary of State for Defence

1. The first report from the Defence Committee Session 1982-3 was published on 16 December 1982. The Government particularly notes the Committee's overall conclusions that, notwithstanding the difficulties which geographical and operational constraints placed upon the Ministry of Defence, the basic goals of Government information policy were met and the credibility of the information issued by the Ministry of Defence was sustained throughout the campaign.
2. The Committee identifies a number of the problems inherent in dealing with the media during any operational situation. Most of the problems which have been highlighted are not unique, nor solely attributable to the Falklands campaign. The Falklands campaign did, however, bring some of these problems to the attention of a wider public and under close scrutiny.
3. Work - which was already in hand to develop Departmental plans and arrangements - has now been resumed with the added impetus of being able to draw on the lessons learned during the Falklands campaign and the observations of the Committee. But whatever the future crisis or the contingency for which plans are drawn up, the Government's policy will continue to be guided by two basic principles. Firstly, while noting the Committee's comments on propaganda, the Government continues to believe both that this must be clearly separate from the Public Relations functions and that the deliberate dissemination of misinformation is bound to be counter-productive.

Despite its short-term attractions, such a policy would inevitably lead in the longer term to a loss of trust and credibility between the media and official spokesmen and thus, ultimately, between the media and the Government. This could in turn have damaging effects on the Government's credibility.

The Committee recognised this (para 138 (iii) of the Report).

On the other hand, The Government draws a clear distinction between misinformation and withholding the whole truth. It will continue to regard the latter as quite separate and acceptable when justified on operational grounds.

4. Secondly, in any future crisis or crisis-planning, the Ministry of Defence will need to retain a considerable degree of flexibility in deciding the extent and composition of media representation. Much will depend on the location of the operation, on whether it is maritime or land-based, on the availability and ease of transport, on difficulties of communication, etc. It is only in the light of the particular factors which might arise that decisions can be taken (in close discussion with the newspaper and broadcasting organisations) about the level, extent and type of representation best suited to that crisis. There cannot be one universal plan to cover each and every possible contingency.

5. Against this background, the Government presents the following observations on the particular issues singled out by the Committee for comment and recommendation.

Censorship of Information in Times of Tension or Conflict

6. This is a subject to which the Ministry of Defence attaches considerable importance. The experience of the Falklands conflict indicated the need for a thorough and wide-ranging study.

Membership of the independently-chaired working party which has been set up to consider this question was announced on

[7] The group will endeavour to complete its work as quickly as possible, but this is a complex subject which extends beyond operations such as the Falklands conflict. We do not therefore expect the Working party to report until the Autumn of 1983.

The Role of D Notices

7. The Defence Press and Broadcasting Committee has reviewed the usefulness of D Notices during the Falklands campaign. Its experience and views will be made available to the working party on censorship.

Ministerial Responsibility For Information Policy

8. The Government notes the Committee's conclusion that in a lengthier or more arduous conflict the Secretary of State for Defence should appoint one of his Ministers to take day-to-day responsibility for defence information policy. The importance of information policy, the need for those dealing with it to be fully aware of the operational considerations, and his own responsibility to keep Parliament properly informed of developments, are such that the Secretary of State may not find it possible to delegate his day-to-day information functions to a junior Minister. But, as the Committee suggests, a final judgement on this could only be made in the light of the nature of any particular conflict.

Structure of MOD Public Relations Organisation

9. The Ministry of Defence agrees that the vacancy in the post of Chief of Public Relations at the time the crisis began inhibited the PR organisation's ability to make arrangements for the media coverage of the campaign. As was explained to the Committee this was a temporary vacancy and the Ministry has always recognised

the importance of having a professional public relations officer at the head of its PR organisation. The Ministry also agrees that it is absolutely essential that there should be the closest relationship between the Chief of Public Relations and his three Service Directors. This has been a guiding principle of the unified organisation for many years.

MOD Contingency Planning for PR in Wartime

10. The Ministry fully accepts that information matters are an intrinsic part of war and must therefore form part of the planning for all operational crises. It is clear that the information aspects need to be more fully incorporated at the earliest stages of planning. The Director of Public Relations (Army) (on behalf of the Chief of Public Relations) has been tasked with examining planning, procedures, accreditation and communication requirements as the first stage of revising all contingency plans so that the PR element can be properly and fully incorporated in future. This work is being progressed as quickly as possible, but it will not be practicable to complete this considerable task as early as Easter 1983. The Ministry agrees that the preparation and training of journalists en route to the theatre of operations is an essential part of this planning. Familiarization training was undertaken for the majority of those who went to the Falklands and particularly for those who went ashore with the first elements of the Task Force.

Co-ordination Between Departments and Ministerial Demarcation

11. The Government entirely concurs with the Committee's advice that No 10 and the Ministry of Defence should operate "in the closest conjunction" and that any failure to do so should be treated extremely seriously. But, it is not considered that any institutional changes are necessary to ensure this happens.

Throughout the Falkland Operations, the senior Public Relations staff of the MOD, the Prime Minister's Press Office and the News Department of the Foreign Office kept in close touch with each other on an hour to hour basis. It is not accepted that there was a failure of communications between No 10 and the Ministry of Defence in the matter of Ministerial demarcation. Although witnesses to the Committee gave differing views on the roles of co-ordinating Ministers, there was no confusion over who was in charge at the time. It is not proposed to make any change to the general and clearly understood principle that the Secretary of State of a Department is the focal point for the policies of that Department, and directly responsible for them.

Off-The-Record Briefings

12. The Ministry of Defence accepts the Committee's conclusion that the temporary suspension of off-the-record briefings was detrimental to relations with the media. It is agreed that briefings at all levels should be maintained throughout a conflict or crisis, though it must be accepted that it will rarely be possible in an operational situation to satisfy the clamour of the media for total openness. Nevertheless, unattributable and background briefings, in addition to on-the-record statements, enable correspondents and editors to gain a fuller appreciation of the overall difficulties being faced in an operation. They thereby help to build up and maintain a mutual trust.

Selection of Public Relations Officers

13. The Ministry does not believe that the effectiveness of the civilian Public Relations Officers in the Falklands was primarily limited by virtue of their grade or seniority or that a greater involvement of serving officer PROs would necessarily have improved

relationships with the media. What is important is not the grade of the individuals but the appropriateness of their background and experience. In an essentially peacetime environment, the opportunities for gaining relevant and realistic experience for civilian or serving officers are inevitably few, except through role-playing and greater involvement in exercises. This aspect of training will be part of the increased PR involvement in contingency planning now being studied. For any future conflict, the choice of PROs will be based as far as possible on individuals' experience and background. Given sufficient time to do so, their suitability will be assessed against the expected type of operation and against the branches of the Armed Forces likely to be involved. But availability of public relations staff at short notice will also be a factor. It is accepted that there is a requirement for one senior and experienced PR person to be clearly in charge of all information staff in the theatre of operations. That individual -- whether Service or civilian -- should have a deputy of the opposite complexion to ensure the best balance of available advice to senior officers and media.

Service Awareness Of The Media

14. The Ministry of Defence agrees that media studies should be an integral part of higher defence training, and increasing attention will be given to this subject. Limited media studies already form part of some of the courses at the Defence and Staff Colleges, and consideration will be given to how increased awareness of the needs of the media can be encouraged in all three Services. The incorporation of a greater element of PR activity in exercise play, as suggested by the Committee, will be considered in this context as well.

Technical Difficulties in Transmission of Voice and Picture Traffic

15. The Ministry of Defence has made it clear to the Committee that there was no lack of will in seeking to provide television pictures, but that severe technical difficulties were encountered. In the limited time available before the hostilities finished, it proved impossible to overcome these. The Ministry is in direct touch with British industry and the media, and together they are examining the technical, operational and other problems involved in the transmission of voice and picture traffic from the theatre of operations at sea or ashore in any future conflict.