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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1
Telephone 01-~~836 7000~~ 218 2111/3

MO 5/21

10th May 1982

Dear John,

[Handwritten initials]

Prime Minister

For information

A.S.C. 10/5

c. de Hylam.

FALKLAND ISLANDS - THE MEDIA

Following this morning's meeting of OD(SA) the Defence Secretary has asked me to circulate for your information the attached record of the latest meeting between Sir Frank Cooper and the Editors of the British press.

I am copying this note and attachment to Private Secretaries to members of OD(SA) and Sir Michael Palliser GCMG and to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

John [unclear]

[Handwritten signature]

(D B OMAND)

A J Coles Esq

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NOTE FOR THE RECORD

THIRD MEETING WITH EDITORS ON FALKLANDS EMERGENCY

1. PUS held a third meeting with Editors on 6 May to discuss media coverage of the Falklands Emergency. A list of those who attended is at Annex A.
2. PUS said that since the last meeting the pace of events in the South Atlantic had quickened and, as suggested, MOD had opened up a full press facility in the Concourse Hall. He was conscious that news was sometimes slower to be released than was desirable. This was due partly to the distances involved and partly to the need to be sure of the facts before making statements. As an additional service to the media, MOD would begin to give specialised background briefings for groups of correspondents.
3. Continuing, he said that there were a number of points causing MOD concern. These included:
 - a. Reporting of assistance from third countries (which could put this in jeopardy).
 - b. Speculation about future operational plans and interception of Argentine communications.
 - c. Harassment of families of Service casualties.
4. In response, Editors expressed concern about the paucity of information being provided by MOD. They appreciated the difficulties caused by long distances and limited communications capacity, but there was a risk of the UK starting to lose public and international sympathy through appearing to be holding back on news when the Argentines had no hesitation about deluging the media with misleading and inaccurate information. Particular points mentioned were:
 - a. Delays in announcing that operations had taken place (eg sinking of General Belgrano).
 - b. Inability of MOD to confirm or deny stories originating from overseas (eg the previous day US sources had been reporting - erroneously - a naval battle in the South Atlantic; MOD did not repudiate this but merely said it "had no information").
 - c. The return of photographs and film from the Task Force and South Georgia was non-existent.

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5. PUS undertook to see what could be done to improve the service in these areas.
6. A number of Editors asked what lay behind recent Ministerial criticism of UK press coverage.
7. Another problem raised was that certain organisations had correspondents with forward elements of Task Force near the Falklands and had good access to news, while others had correspondents only in Canberra off Ascension who were producing very little. It was suggested that reports might be pooled for all UK media. [This did not meet with an immediate response from those Editors with well-placed correspondents, but after the briefing the BBC and ITN offered to make their reports available to press through PA]. A plea was made for greater access for major regional newspapers.
7. It was suggested that any harassment of families could be avoided by MOD providing pictures of the Servicemen concerned. This had solved a similar problem for the Army in Northern Ireland.
8. It was agreed to hold a further meeting in about one week's time.

Comment

While exchanges at the meeting were good-natured, there was clearly a good deal of disquiet on the part of Editors and criticism of the speed and quantity of news provided by MOD. There was a clear feeling that the press was being criticised by Government but inadequately provided with information.

S Webb

S WEBB
PS/PUS

7 May 1982

ISSUE: HR 27 MOD MB

ANNEX

DATE: May 6, 1982

TIME: 1750 for 1800

| Newspaper, Agency, etc | Reporters | Photography | Other details |
|------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| BBC External Services | Ken Brazier | | |
| BBC TV | Allan Protheroe | A/DG | |
| BBC Radio | John Wilson | | |
| | Larry Hodgson | | |
| Daily Telegraph | Wm Deedes | | |
| Financial Times | G. D. Owen | | |
| Guardian | Peter Preston | | |
| IRN | Peter Thornton | | |
| Daily Mail | David Tytler | Deputy Editor | |
| PA | David Chipp | | |
| Daily Express | Chris Ward | | |
| ITN | David Nicholas | | |
| Sunday Express | Mike Toner | Political Editor. | |
| Sunday Telegraph | John Thompson | | |
| Sunday Times | Frank Giles | | |
| Daily Mirror | Peter Thompson | Deputy Editor | |
| Economist | Andrew Knight | | |
| Star | Brian Hitchens | | |
| News of the World | Derek Jameson | | |
| Sunday People | Nick Lloyd or Barrington | Associate Editor. | |
| Mail on Sunday | Anthony Shrivley | Associate Editor. | |
| Reuters | Stewart | Chief Correspondent | |
| OBSERVER | * IAN LINDSEY-SMITH | EXECUTIVE EDITOR. | |
| NEWSPAPER CONFERENCE | Mr McDonald | CHAIRMAN | |
| TIMES | FRED EMERY | EXECUTIVE EDITOR | |
| BBC | PETER WOON | NEWS EDITOR. | |

