



Prime Minister
Agree revised
wording.

Yes Mr

MO 22/5

PRIME MINISTER

BEACH REPORT ON THE CONTROL OF MILITARY INFORMATION

When we discussed the Beach Report at OD on 21st January, we were concerned about the possible abuse of the automatic freedom which the study group proposed that the British media should have to publish anything already published in the foreign media. I was invited to circulate a revised version of paragraph 9 and the response to Recommendation XXIII in the draft Command Paper.

2. I share the concern over the dangers of abuse. Given, however, that to reject the Recommendation would provide the only point on which the Government could be said to be taking a harder line than General Beach and his Committee, I am also concerned to ensure that we do nothing to fuel the present public debate over the Official Secrets Act and access to information generally. The Government really cannot say what detailed restrictions would apply in crisis and war: so much depends on the circumstances.

3. I therefore propose that we accept the Recommendation in principle but make clear that restrictions might be required in practice. The possible need to counter enemy propaganda (which while rather different from national security, was in our minds at OD), could provide a suitable ground for restrictions. The relevant part of paragraph 9 would read as follows:

"The Government accepts that recognised foreign correspondents in London should receive essentially the same facilities and



guidance as British correspondents and that the British media should in principle be free to report that which has already been reported in foreign media. In practice, there could be a need for guidance or restrictions on republication of foreign reports, depending on the circumstances of the time - for example the extent to which misleading enemy propaganda had been published."

The response to Recommendation XXIII would then read as follows:

"Accepted in principle: the extent to which guidance or restrictions could be necessary in practice must be for the Government and Parliament of the day."

4. I propose to publish the Government response in the first half of April. I should be grateful, therefore, for confirmation that you and our colleagues are content by 29th March.

5. I am sending copies of this minute to other colleagues on OD, the Home Secretary and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Ministry of Defence
27th March 1985

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FOR THE PEOPLE

28 MAR 1985

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SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE

Beach Report

1. I have now seen your minute of 27 March to the Prime Minister. I agree with your recommendation, which accords with our discussion in OD on 21 January.

2. I am copying this minute to OD colleagues, the Home Secretary and Sir Robert Armstrong.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'G. Howe'.

GEOFFREY HOWE

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

1 April 1985

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From the Private Secretary

28 March 1985

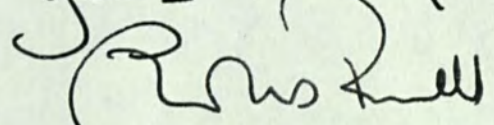
Dear Richard,

Beach Report on the Control of
Military Information

The Prime Minister has considered the Defence Secretary's minute of 27 March about the Beach Report.

Subject to the views of colleagues the Prime Minister is content with the proposals in paragraph 3 of that minute.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to members of OD, to the Private Secretary to the Home Secretary and to Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely,

(Charles Powell)

Richard Mottram, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence.

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