

CONFIDENTIAL



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB  
Telephone 01-~~3307822~~ 218 6169

MO22/5

18th April 1985

*Dear Tim*

*Done*  
*NR 19/4.*  
*Nkey*  
*p3r curbs*  
*current*

This is to confirm that we intend to publish the Government's response to the Beach Report on the Control of Military Information as a Command Paper at 1530 next Wednesday, the 24th. I attach a proof copy of the text, which has of course been approved by OD. Publication will be linked to an arranged written PQ. I should be grateful to know by Monday next that you are content with these arrangements.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries of the members of OD, to Chris Roberts (Chief Whip's Office) and to Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

*Yours*  
*D J Woodhead*

(D J WOODHEAD)

Timothy Flesher Esq  
10 Downing Street

CONFIDENTIAL



**Ministry of Defence**

**The Protection of Military Information**

Government Response to the Report of the  
Study Group on Censorship

*Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Defence  
by Command of Her Majesty  
April 1985*

LONDON  
HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE

£0.00 net

Cmnd. 0000

**THE PROTECTION OF MILITARY INFORMATION  
GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF  
THE STUDY GROUP ON CENSORSHIP**

**PRESENTED TO PARLIAMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE  
FOR DEFENCE  
BY COMMAND OF HER MAJESTY  
APRIL 1985**

1. This paper sets out the Government's response to the report of the Study Group on Censorship (Cmnd. 9112), which was presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Defence in December 1983. The Study Group was appointed by the Secretary of State in February 1983, with the following terms of reference. "To consider, not least in the light of experience during the Falkland Islands operations, whether any new measures including the introduction of a system of censorship, are necessary in order to protect military information immediately prior to or during conduct of operations." The following paragraphs deal with the main themes of the Study Group's conclusions and recommendations—which are summarised in Chapter 7 of their report. The table at Annex indicates the Government's response to each of the 40 detailed recommendations.

2. The Government wishes to express its gratitude to General Sir Hugh Beach, to the distinguished members of the Study Group and to the secretaries for their thorough and lucid examination of this complex, indeed emotive, subject. As the Study Group's report says (paragraph 28) "Censorship has a bad name in Western societies. By derivation and by centuries of use, the term itself has come to connote the suppression of opinion or the restriction of the free communication of fact". The Study Group has given the Government an excellent basis on which to judge the benefits and penalties of censorship, the practical considerations and the acceptable limits to which censorship can be taken in a free society, as the House of Commons Defence Committee suggested. The desirability of a concerted approach within the NATO Alliance has also been borne very much in mind.

**General Principles**

3. The Government accepts that few (if indeed any) journalists would willingly publish information which would place lives and the interests of their country at stake in a time of crisis. Plainly, however, journalists cannot always identify precisely the information which would be of use to an enemy. The Government therefore has a duty to provide authoritative advice in the expectation that most journalists would welcome it. There is a difficult balance to be struck between Government's ultimate right and responsibility to act in the interests of national security and the desirability of maintaining the best possible flow of accurate information to the public. In free societies of course the media offers not just fact but informed analysis and criticism.

4. The Government agrees that compulsion of the media would be neither practicable nor desirable and that voluntary co-operation should be the guiding principle. The Government must create the greatest possible degree of trust

between itself and the media; and intensive (and where necessary confidential) briefings have a part to play in this. The Government's aim in peacetime will be to develop, through consultation with the media, the widest possible consensus as to what constitutes legitimate protection of the interests of national security in time of conflict.

#### **Broadcasting**

5. The Government recognises that the media must be able to convey an accurate impression of the nature of conflict. There is also, however, a danger, particularly with television, of intrusion on the private distress of British and Allied Servicemen and their families. The Study Group's recommendations on casualty reporting will therefore be drawn to the attention of the media organisations so that they may consider reviewing their codes of practice.

#### **Home Censorship**

6. The Government recognises the importance of the control of military information in a major conventional war and that timely arrangements to that end would require contingency planning in peacetime. The Government agrees that extensive guidance to editors would be essential. The Government does not however, believe that a system of home censorship similar to that which operated in the Second World War is practicable today. The totally different volume and nature of international communication and the much larger number of media outlets mean that for practical purposes the country can no longer be enclosed in an "information net". As the Study Group points out, any censorship of the media, to be acceptable, would have to be "enlightened, fair and efficient". But to make it so by this means would require a complex organisation of several hundred high-calibre, well trained staff ready in peacetime to operate at a few days notice. Moreover, unless all our NATO Allies were prepared to adopt similar policies, the efforts of a British censorship could be largely frustrated by factors outside its control.

7. The Government therefore considers that the control of information in general war should rest on an improved advisory service for journalists as is recommended by the Study Group for the control of information in limited conflicts. The Government will set up an embryo organisation which will develop written guidance in consultation with the Defence Press and Broadcasting Committee (DPBC). The embryo organisation will also identify and train a body of staff who could be available at short notice to provide immediate continuous advice to journalists if the need arose. The Government will further consult the DPBC about whether it has any role to perform in time of transition to war or in war itself.

8. The Government accepts that circumstances could arise where additional powers need to be taken for the control of information or special arrangements needed for the live reporting of Parliament. But such matters must be for the Government and Parliament of the day.

9. 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 has been published. It is also accepted that there may be a case for regulating international telephone and telex calls to and from this country and that authorised users might include the media. These matters will be pursued. The Government agrees that the question of controls over private mail and freight and travellers leaving the country could only be considered in the light of conditions prevailing at the time. Adequate procedures already exist to prohibit the use of radio transmitters as and when determined by the Secretary of State.

#### **Field Censorship**

10. The Government accepts that control over military information in the field—in both general war and limited conflicts—should be based on an “accreditation bargain” and “stop lists”. This is very much in line with current plans. Work is already in hand to determine the best possible arrangements, which clearly need to cater both for controlling access to sensitive areas and information; and giving adequate facilities to accredited journalists. Plans were recently tested in exercise LIONHEART. Media organisations will be invited to participate in further work.

#### **Co-ordination with NATO**

11. The Government accepts that arguments for censorship, particularly of information specific to and available only in the United Kingdom, are not completely dependent on all other NATO Allies adopting a similar policy. Nevertheless, the views of our Allies will affect what can practicably be achieved in this country. It is therefore highly desirable that the arrangements eventually adopted by the British Government are concerted with NATO allies to the maximum possible extent. To that end, the Government proposes to draw the Study Group's report and this response to it to the attention of the Alliance. The Government will seek to keep the Alliance informed on and involved with its developing policy on relations with the media, both in the field and at home, in major conflicts.

#### **Additional points**

12. The Government accepts that “double vetting” is undesirable. The arrangements for protecting military information will be an area of continuous development and review but officials will be asked to make a formal review of progress in the light, amongst other things, of changes in technology, beginning in 1989. A good deal of consideration has already been given to handling as well as protection of information. Nevertheless, the Government recognises that room for improvement exists and work will continue, especially on the question of the accreditation bargain, with the aim of achieving the widest possible consensus amongst the media on the contents of stop-lists and of providing the public relations departments in Whitehall and in the Services with adequate (and where necessary enhanced) complements for war.

STUDY GROUP RECOMMENDATION

**General Principles**

i. Although most journalists would exercise self-censorship when lives and the interests of their own country were at stake, they cannot always identify precisely the information which would be of use to an enemy. Some form of official censorship in time of conflict is therefore desirable. Provided this were enlightened, fair and efficient, most journalists would accept it (paras 134 and 135).

ii. Censorship should be limited to preventing the untimely disclosure of information which would prejudice our own or Allied operations and assist the enemy (paras 137 and 141).

9 iii. It is important for public morale that as much news as possible reach the people. There may be good reasons for a Government to seek to delay news of a defeat. But information should always be released as soon as it is safe to do so (paras 143 and 144).

iv. Deliberate dissemination of false information through the media is to be eschewed; and deception should form no part of any censorship system. But sophisticated measures to deceive the enemy have a proper role to play in wartime (para 155).

v. Well-informed speculation in the media may occasionally give the enemy useful leads. Retired officers and others in receipt of official information should therefore be required to check with MOD before accepting invitations from the media in times of conflict (paras 156 and 157).

vi. A system of intensive (and where necessary confidential) briefings both of editors and of correspondents will help to build a relationship of trust and encourage journalists to protect militarily damaging information. The authorities should explain the reasons for their censorship decisions (paras 159 and 160).

vii. Military information needs to be protected at the very beginning of a conflict. Contingency planning is therefore necessary (para 161).

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

i. Accepted so far as field censorship is concerned.

ii. Accepted.

iii. Accepted.

iv. Accepted.

v. Accepted: this will be pursued by the Ministry of Defence.

vi. Accepted: such briefings will form part of contingency plans.

vii. Accepted.

## STUDY GROUP RECOMMENDATION

### Broadcasting

viii. The media in general and television in particular, should refrain from showing close-up pictures of untreated casualties in serious distress, and should delay showing pictures, or giving names, of any other identifiable casualties for a reasonable period of time. Small revisions to British broadcasters' codes on violence would meet concerns on this front (paras 148 and 149).

ix. A code of practice on violence which reflects concerns about casualty reporting in times of conflict should also be applied by cable operators (para 150).

x. Broadcasting organisations should consider coordinating codes of wartime reporting with their West European counterparts (para 151).

### Transition to War

xi. In a period of mounting East-West tension, some restriction of the circulation of military information might be necessary both to prevent war and, if it broke out, to ensure military effectiveness. A good response would probably be obtained from a voluntary arrangement with the media. But if the Government believed more were needed it would be for them to judge whether legislation would be politically acceptable (paras 167 to 174).

xii. Units on the ground should accredit as many as possible of the war correspondents present (para 176).

xiii. Service censorship should begin in a period of mounting East-West tension. Censorship should also apply to civilians in military headquarters and other vital areas (para 177).

### Major Conventional War

xiv. A censorship system in the United Kingdom would be valuable in a major conventional war, irrespective of what might be the practice on the Continent (para 138).

## GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

viii, ix, x. Accepted in principle: the Government will draw to the attention of media organisations.

See page 2.

See page 2.

xi. Accepted: additional powers would be a matter for the Government and Parliament of the day.

xii. Accepted: but in practice decisions would rest with the Defence Public Relations Staff rather than units on the ground.

xiii. Accepted in principle: further work will be required on practical arrangements.

xiv. Accepted but without commonality of practice the value of any United Kingdom measure is very much reduced.

## STUDY GROUP RECOMMENDATION

### Major Conventional War (contd.)

xv. Such a system should be under-pinned by Defence Regulations broadly similar to those issued in the last war (paras 180 and 181, and 193 to 195).

xvi. Submission to the Press Censorship should be voluntary (para 183).

xvii. Guidance should be issued to British editors; and should be discussed in advance with the media. This could be done through the D Notice Committee. The latter should provide the main forum for consultation between Government and media but should not handle specific complaints, which should be left to the Censorship (paras 184 to 187).

xviii. Censors should be of high calibre, and have a good knowledge of the media and of their subject. A nucleus of 30 should be trained for future contingencies. A Chief Press Censor should be appointed, with direct access to Ministers. He and his staff should be distinct from the MOD Chief of Public Relations and his organisation (paras 188 and 189).

xix. A scrutiny section should be set up to scan both the British and the foreign media for breaches of the regulations (para 190).

xx. Broadcasters should consider revising their codes of practice for wartime reporting to cover live 'phone in programmes (paras 107 and 191).

xxi. Special arrangements may be needed for the live radio reporting of Parliament (para 192).

xxii. Foreign correspondents working in this country should register with the Government, be issued with guidance and encouraged to submit material for vetting; only authorised video pictures should be transmitted. Their international telephone and telex calls should be monitored selectively (paras 196 and 197).

## GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

xv. This must be a matter for the Government and Parliament of the day.

xvi. Accepted.

xvii. Accepted. The Defence Press and Broadcasting Committee will be consulted further about whether it has any role to perform in transition to war or in war itself.

xviii. The Government does not believe that an effective dormant censorship organisation is a practical proposition. Instead, it proposes to rely on an advisory service to journalists as the Study Group recommended (xxxii) for limited conflicts. An embryo organisation will be set up to make plans accordingly and identify suitable staff.

xix. Accepted, in the context of the Government's proposals.

xx. Accepted in principle: to be drawn to the attention of media organisations.

xxi. This must be a matter for the Government and Parliament of the day.

xxii. Accepted in principle: further work is required on practicalities.



## STUDY GROUP RECOMMENDATION

### Major Conventional War (contd.)

xxiii. Once information is published outside this country, its publication by the British media must be allowed (para 199).

xxiv. A system should be provided under which international telephone and telex calls to and from this country could be regulated in a major war. Authorised users should include the media (paras 202 to 204).

xxv. Censorship of private mail, freight and travellers leaving the country should be considered in the light of conditions prevailing at the time. "Cables" could be censored by stationing censors in the cable offices (paras 205 and 206).

xxvi. Most licences for long-distance radio transmitters should be revoked. The policing of such a measure should be given further thought by the experts (para 207).

xxvii. In a major war in Europe, the forces of Allied nations would be brought under the command of the Major NATO Commanders; a firm direction to them on military information policy from the North Atlantic Council is therefore important (paras 140 and 176).

xxviii. An accreditation "bargain" should be struck with war correspondents. Further study should be given to the type of facilities which could be offered and to the number and types of correspondents who should be offered them (paras 208 and 209).

xxix. Because of the difficulties of stopping all transmissions of information by non-authorised persons, the military would need to exercise rigid control of access to sensitive areas and information (paras 210 to 212).

xxx. Escort officers should be distinct from censors. Both should be carefully selected and trained. This also applies to a limited conflict (paras 213 and 224).

xxxi. The type of information to be protected needs to be discussed in NATO. Some field censorship of casualty reporting would be necessary (para 214).

## GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

xxiii. 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.

xxiv. This will be pursued.

xxv. Accepted.

xxvi. The desirability of restrictions on the use of long range radio transmitters is recognised. Adequate powers already exist to impose such restrictions.

xxvii. This is a matter for the Alliance as a whole. The Government will consult our Allies.

xxviii. Accepted.

xxix. Accepted.

xxx. Accepted.

xxxi. Accepted (see xxvii above).

## STUDY GROUP RECOMMENDATION

### Limited Conflicts

xxxii. There should be no formal censorship system at home in limited conflicts. But there would be merit in providing an improved advisory service for journalists, based on the D Notice system. Thought should be given now to the type of information that would need to be protected (para 216 to 218).

xxxiii. The foreign media should not be obliged to participate in the system but should be encouraged to do so. MOD should improve its relations with them (para 220).

xxxiv. In the field, an accreditation "bargain" with war correspondents should again apply. But it would only work as long as control of access in and around the conflict area were possible. This should be studied by MOD (paras 221 and 222).

xxxv. The Government should consider the impact of their decision on international opinion when deciding whether to accredit foreign war correspondents (para 223).

xxxvi. "Stop lists" should form part of MOD contingency plans (para 225).

xxxvii. Service correspondence should normally be censored (para 226).

### Additional Points

xxxviii. There should not normally be a second level of vetting in London. A small unit of "field" censors might, however, be necessary in this country to handle correspondents accompanying the Armed Forces on sorties but returning to the United Kingdom to prepare their material (paras 227 and 228).

xxxix. In view of developments in technology, we recommend reappraisal before the end of the decade (para 229).

xxxx. The "handling" and "protection" of information are two sides of the same coin. British Governments should pay more attention to the former as well as to the latter (paras 159 and 232).

## GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

xxxii. Accepted. The Defence Press and Broadcasting Committee will be consulted further about its role in such a situation.

xxxiii. Accepted.

xxxiv. Accepted.

xxxv. Accepted.

xxxvi. Accepted.

xxxvii. Accepted in principle: further work is required on the practicalities.

xxxviii. Accepted.

xxxix. Accepted: officials will review progress in 1989.

xxxx. Accepted.

HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE

*Government Bookshops*

49 High Holborn, London WC1V 6HB  
13a Castle Street, Edinburgh EH2 3AR  
Brazennose Street, Manchester M60 8AS  
Southey House, Wine Street, Bristol BS1 2BQ  
258 Broad Street, Birmingham B1 2HE  
80 Chichester Street, Belfast BT1 4JY

*Government publications are also available  
through booksellers*

ISBN 0 10 000000 0

