

DEFENCE, PRESS AND BROADCASTING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
AT 6 PM ON TUESDAY 13 JANUARY 2004

1. Present:

Sir Kevin Tebbit, Chairman
Mr I Andrews
Mr W Ehrman
Sir David Omand

Mr R Hutchinson, Vice Chairman
Mr J Bishop
Mr G Brock
Mr S Bucks
Mr R Esser
Ms D Fitzsimons

Rear Admiral N Wilkinson - Secretary
Captain N Hodgson - Deputy Secretary

2. Apologies: Mr S Anderson, Mr J Gieve, Mr A Goode, Mr J Grun, Mr J McLellan, Mr C Roycroft-Davis, Mr S Whittle, Mr W Wilson.

3. The Chairman welcomed Ms Derval Fitzsimons (ITN) to her first meeting.

Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of Meeting held 15 May 2003

4. There were no amendments

Agenda Item 2 – Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

5. DPBAC Reception. Approximately 85 had accepted to attend the annual reception on 15 October, and, with few last-minute cancellations, there had therefore been a good mix of current Committee, senior officials, and media guests from across the spectrum and of all ages. As in the previous year, the informal nature of the event had enabled much useful discussion to take place, and both media and officials had again commented favourably on this. The Chairman suggested that a similar event should be held in October/November 2004, and this was agreed.

ACTION: SECRETARY

6. 'Official' Representation at Seminars, etc. The Chairman enquired whether any progress had been made by Official Members in finding speakers who might be able when appropriate to put the point of view of the Official Side at seminars and on TV/radio when secret intelligence and security-related matters were being discussed.

The Secretary reported that he was aware that the Security Service had been reviewing this idea, but had as yet not reached any conclusions. The MOD already participated in Defence-related events. The Chairman asked the Secretary to approach the appropriate Department as and when he became aware of events concerning secret intelligence/security at which official representation might be welcome.

ACTION: SECRETARY

7. MOD/Media Forum on the Iraq Campaign 2003. Mr Andrews said that the MOD was grateful for the media participation in the forum hosted by the RUSI on 23 June 2003, a record of which was available from the Institute. The MOD/media dialogue was continuing, particularly concerning embedded journalists, and the Green Book would be revised by MOD in the next few months. Both sides agreed on the importance of being able to report local events in the wider context. Sir David Omand enquired whether the media generally considered that their journalists in theatre had been adequately trained for the operational environment there. The Media Members said it was a mixed picture, with some journalists arriving better prepared than others, and some host units giving more training than others to journalists on arrival. The Committee agreed that there was a duty of care for both media employers and MOD, but that, by comparison with relevant media preparatory plans in the USA, there were limitations on how much contingency preparation of the UK media was practicable. The Chairman summed up that there were generic aspects, such as that journalists deployed nowadays to an operational theatre would mostly not be experienced war reporters, and there were scenario-specific aspects which required different training for different scenarios. These were not strictly matters for the DPBAC, but for MOD to manage with media organisations, and the next step was to update the Green Book to reflect embedded journalism, which was here to stay, and how the strategic picture was presented during each day of operations. The Chairman nevertheless welcomed such matters being brought up for discussion in DPBAC meetings.

8. SF PI Policy. See Item 4 below.

Agenda Item 3 – Secretary’s Report

9. Routine Activities. The Secretary reported no change in the types of advice given, nor in the pattern of activity, except during the Hutton Inquiry, when media and official attention was largely focussed on the Inquiry rather than on operational aspects of national security. There had been no novel or contentious problems to be brought to the Committee’s attention, no parliamentary enquiries and only three books on which advice had been given – one a novel by an ex-SF author, one the first book on SF operations in Afghanistan, written by a journalist based on first-hand accounts, and one due to be published shortly on ‘Stakeknife’.

10. ‘Stakeknife’. Further to the Secretary’s report at the previous meeting on his involvement in giving advice on allegations in the media, he had subsequently been partially misquoted on two BBC television programmes, which he had taken up with the BBC, but which had also led to correspondence with the solicitor of

Mr Scappaticci. The Secretary reiterated that no intelligence/security agency had ever told him that the latter had been an informer, and any information about his alleged whereabouts had always come to the Secretary from the media or the public. Sir David Omand enquired about any legal liability which might be attached to the Committee, arising from the Secretary's involvement. The Secretary reported that, where appropriate, he did seek legal advice, but that his role was anyway limited to the giving of advice, which did not have to be accepted. The Committee agreed that there was unlikely to be a problem, but the Chairman asked the Secretary nevertheless to give further thought to this aspect. **ACTION: SECRETARY**

11. Iraq. Since the end of the high-intensity phase of the Iraq campaign, there had been a steady trickle of requests for advice on SF stories. Some of these were known by the Secretary to be untrue and he told journalists so, and the stories had, therefore, not been published; otherwise his advice on protecting operational security had been accepted.

12. Briefing/Seminars. The Secretary had continued his programme of visits to Schools of Journalism, and had discussed national security and the DPBAC system with mainly post-graduate groups averaging about 40 in number at City University, Falmouth, London College of Printing, Goldsmiths, Westminster and Edinburgh Napier, with re-visits to Bournemouth, Sheffield and Cardiff planned. The discussions were much appreciated by students and staff, and were contributing (with the widely-visited website) to improving accurate knowledge about the role of the DPBAC. The Secretary had also briefed three visiting foreign official/media delegations, and participated in seminars organised by the US Media Law Resource Center, and the Index on Censorship, and had addressed the alumni of an Oxford College, and participated in the annual conference of the Society of Editors.

13. Official History. The Secretary reported that, following the death of the intended author, Commander Francis Ponsonby, he had been looking for a replacement. Because of the need for the author to have the necessary security clearances to access the classified archives, and because of the desirability of some background in national security, it had been difficult to find a new author. The Cabinet Office had suggested, and the Chairman had now agreed, that this task should now be taken on as a part-time project by the present Secretary, after he stepped down from the post in November 2004, with the intention of completing the work at the end of 2007.

Agenda Item 4 – Special Forces Public Information Policy.

14. Mr Andrews said that MOD was acutely aware of the length of time it was taking to complete the review of the SF PI policy discussed at previous meetings, and fully understood the views of the Media Side about this. Unfortunately, however, recent events meant that MOD still needed to do further work on the review, which meant that there was little more he could say at this meeting. He considered this to be

a separate matter from the wider role of the Committee, and the delay did not hinder the Secretary in the way he was currently able to give advice on SF matters.

15. The Vice Chairman enquired how much longer the review would take, and said that the credibility of both sides of the Committee was, in different ways, at stake. For example, US and Australian Special Forces operating alongside UKSF, had a much more open PI policy than that of MOD, which was even more restrictive now than it had been in 1996. In further discussion, Mr Andrews stressed the complexities of protecting the personal and operational security of UKSF, but said that progress was being made with the review. The Media members regarded the issue as inseparable from the wider role of the Committee and the credibility of the DPBAC system, and asked if MOD could give a further progress report to the Media Side at the end of March. MOD agreed to this. In summing up, the Chairman said that he would continue to convey the strength and nature of media concerns in the further consideration of the MOD review.

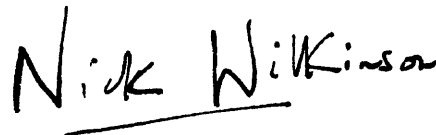
ACTION: 2ND PUS

Agenda Item 5 – Any Other Business

16. There were none.

Next Meeting

17. The Chairman asked the Secretary to arrange the next meeting in late May.


Secretary

20 January 2004

Distribution

All Committee Members