

The Defence & Security Media Advisory Committee
Minutes of a Meeting Held in the Ministry of Defence
At 6pm on Thursday 8 November 2018

D/DSMA/3/2/1

The following were present:

Mr Dominic Wilson (Chairman)	Mr John Battle (Joint Vice-Chairman)
Mr Simon Shercliff (FCO)	Mr Ian Murray (Joint Vice-Chairman)
Mr Graeme Biggar (Home Office)	Ms Laura Adams
Ms Madeleine Alessandri (Cab Office)	Mr Peter Clifton
Mr Paul Wyatt (MOD)	Mr Joe Fay
	Mr Charles Garside
	Mr James Green
	Mr Michael Jermey
	Mr David Jordan
	Mr John McLellan
	Mr Owen Meredith
	Mr Charlie Redmayne
	Mr Craig Tregurtha
	Ms Sarah Whitehead

Brigadier Geoffrey Dodds	Secretary
Air Commodore David Adams	First Deputy Secretary
Group Captain John Alexander	Second Deputy Secretary

1. There were apologies from Jess Brammar, Janine Gibson and David Higginson.
2. The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming four new Committee members: Madeleine Alessandri (DNSA Cabinet Office), Paul Wyatt (Director National Security, MOD), Jess Brammar (Head of News, Huffington Post) and Janine Gibson

(Editor, BuzzFeed). Paul Johnson (Deputy Editor, The Guardian) had retired from the Committee on 30 October.

Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 May 2018

3. The minutes of the meeting were approved by the Committee as an accurate record.

Agenda Item 2 – Matters Arising from the Previous Meeting

4. There were 3 matters arising from the 17 May meeting:
 - a. **Para 8.** Following the Cambridge Analytica event and the resulting delay in establishing contacts with the so-called Tech Giants (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft), the Secretary had agreed to pursue opportunities at the appropriate time. This would be covered under Item 4.
 - b. **Paras 8 and 14.** Following the upward trend in references to the DSMA System on Twitter and blogs in the weeks following the Skripal poisonings, the Secretary had agreed to investigate further. This would be covered under Item 5.
 - c. **Paras 7 and 14.** The Secretary had agreed to consider how best to incorporate “cyber” either into the existing notices or into a new DSMA Notice 6. This would be covered under Item 6.

Agenda Item 3 – Secretary’s Report

5. **Overview.** The last 6 months had been a very quiet period during which the DSMA Secretariat had received 69 enquiries and requests for DSMA Notice advice; the lowest total since November 2016 and 42% below the historical average (118). Significantly, 84% of these requests were made in the period before the end of August and just over one third were related to the events following the Skripal incident. The reduced number of requests for advice stood in stark contrast to the particularly busy period in the earlier part of the year.

6. **DSMA Notices to All Editors**. One supplementary DSMA notice was issued on 20 July in relation to IA methods and techniques employed while attempting to identify the perpetrators of the Skripal incident. The notice was issued as a as a reminder to editors of the advice offered in standing DSMA Notice 03.
7. **Main Areas of Inquiry**. Requests by the media and officials for DSMA Notice advice during the period were focussed on 2 areas:
 - a. **The Intelligence Agencies (26)**. In the main, advice was offered on SPI matters relating to the Skripal incident and subsequent events (16). A further 6 advisories were made on book manuscripts.
 - b. **Special Forces (14)**. Exceptionally, the majority of advice was offered in relation to book manuscripts and programme broadcasting matters (8).
8. **Other Areas of Inquiry**. There were no particular events or discernible trends amongst the other areas of inquiry.
9. **IICSA**. Following a thorough examination of all existing D/DA/DSMA system files, the Secretariat had submitted a dossier of written evidence to the Inquiry in October 2017. Andrew Connor, QC for the Inquiry, indicated in late October 2018 that he expected to call the Secretary to give evidence at the Westminster hearings in March 2019.
10. **Administration**. The DSMA Secretariat had completed a number of significant administrative improvements.
 - a. Full access to Online Newspapers and Magazines.
 - b. Redevelopment of the DSMA website (expected to be on-line in 4 weeks).
 - c. Replacement of office IT (computer, printer, security software).
11. **Discussion**. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman thanked the Secretary for his report. The Chairman asked if

there were any particular causes for the reduced number of requests for DSM advice during the last 6 months. After some discussion, all agreed that this downturn was simply a reflection of the normal course of events. Following the spike in requests created by the Skripal event, there had been other items which had dominated news reporting. The Vice-Chair thanked the Official Side for funding the improvements to the Secretariat's administration and said that the Media Side would welcome the opportunity to view the new website before it went live.

Action: The Secretary

Agenda Item 4 – Increasing the Digital Membership of the Committee

12. The Secretary introduced this item. Following the Cambridge Analytica event and the resulting delay in establishing contacts with the so-called Tech Giants, he had restarted efforts in conjunction with DMCS's external relationship team. There had been some positive indications but nothing concrete. The Secretary advised that it remained his intention to continue to seek ways in which to start conversations. He was optimistic that in the coming months, both parties could start an engagement process.
13. In discussion, the Media Side offered the view that the Tech Giants might not necessarily be the most fruitful organisations to pursue at this stage. It may be more useful to continue to develop relationships with other digital media organisations. Furthermore, if the Committee really did want to make contact with the Tech Giants, then it should be clear what it expected to achieve from such engagement beforehand. The Media Side continued with a different angle: emphasis should be on digital publications rather than social media and on the latter, the Committee should again, be clear what it expected to achieve. In drawing the discussion to a close, the Chairman said that we should pursue these questions outside the meeting and decide the best way ahead.

Action: The Secretary

Agenda Item 5 – Increased Twitter and Blog references to the DSMA Notice System

14. The Second Deputy Secretary introduced this item. The Secretariat had completed a subjective assessment into the upward trend in references to the DSMA Notice System on Twitter and blogs in the immediate period after the Skripal event (early March 2018) and following the identification of the two GRU officers in early October. There had been several allegations that DSMA notices were instruments of government cover-up, some by widely followed accounts critical of the British government's position. A university academic had published the two Skripal-related DSMA notices on the web. The academic concerned had been offered the opportunity for his students to receive a full DSMA presentation.
15. There remained a trickle of allegations of the use of the DSMA Notice system in other instances. The Secretariat received a number of questions, sometimes attempted as FOI requests, from members of the public who were concerned that DSMA Notices may have been issued about them. All these inquiries have proved unwarranted but, given the timing, may have been prompted by the online Skripal DSMA Notice coverage.
16. The Chairman thanked the Second Deputy Secretary for his report. There followed some discussion about how the Secretariat should use its Twitter account: whether, as now, solely to monitor Twitter or to more proactively engage and explain how the DSMA System worked, while noting the potential risks involved.
17. The Chairman concluded the Committee should return to the subject of the Twitter account at the next meeting, and in the meantime ensure the account pointed enquiries to the new DSMA website.

Action: The Secretary

Agenda Item 6 – Incorporation of “cyber” into the existing DSMA Notices

18. The Chairman invited the Secretary to introduce this item. The Secretary said that following the meeting with the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) last year and the Committee's direction at this year's Spring meeting, he had held discussions with members from GCHQ to assess the feasibility of including the cyber threat into the standing set of DSMA notices.
19. Against this background, the DSMA Secretariat had formed the DSMA Cyber Working Group which had held its inaugural meeting on 19 September where it was agreed that:
- a. For the time being, the existing set of standing DSMA notices were sufficiently broad in construction to cope with any likely requirement for their use in connection with the cyber threat.
 - b. Any additional text would only serve to confuse at this stage.
 - c. The Group would review the notices:
 - i. Every 6 months.
 - ii. In the light of developments and experience.
 - iii. Whenever the threat or situation demanded it.
 - d. GCHQ would be the first point of contact for providing the Secretariat with subject matter expertise when required.
20. It was agreed that this was a sound approach. There was no point in extending the notices if they work.

Agenda Item 7 - Any Other Business

21. There was no other business.

Farewells

22. The Chairman thanked Paul Johnson for his service to the Committee. Paul had joined the Committee in the wake of the Snowden affair and had been instrumental in re-establishing links with the Guardian.

Next Meeting

23. The next DSMA Committee Meeting would take place at 1800 on Thursday 16 May 2019. It would be preceded by the Media Side pre-meeting which would begin as usual at 1700.

Geoffrey Dodds

Geoffrey Dodds
Brigadier
Secretary, DSMA Committee

15 December 2018

Distribution

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