

**MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD IN THE MINISTRY OF
DEFENCE IN HISTORIC ROOM 13 AT 6PM ON TUESDAY 29
APRIL 2025**

**THE DEFENCE AND SECURITY MEDIA ADVISORY
COMMITTEE**

D/DSMA/3/2/1

The following were present:

Mr Paul Wyatt (Chairman)
Mr Gareth Martin (MOD)
Ms Kitty Jenkins (FCDO)
Mr Jonathan Sinclair (Home Office)

Mr John Battle (Vice-Chairman)
Ms Dawn Alford
Mr Ian Brunskill
Mr Andrew Dagnell
Mr James Green
Mr David Jordan
Mr Paul Kunert
Mr Jack Lefley
Mr John McLellan
Ms Lisa Mitchell
Mr Charlie Redmayne
Ms Joy Yates

Brigadier Geoffrey Dodds (Retired) Secretary
Captain Jon Perkins RN (Retired) First Deputy Secretary
Lt Cdr Stephen Dudley RN (Retired) Second Deputy Secretary

Apologies had been received from:

Ms Natasha Anku, Mr Matthew Collins, Mr David Dillon, Mr Joe Fay, Ms Sayra Tekin, Ms Sarah Whitehead, Ms Eilidh Wilson and Mr Robert Winnett.

The Chairman welcomed three new members to the Committee:

Mr Jack Lefley, Editor in Chief, PA Media
Mr Andrew Dagnell, Dir of News, ITV
Ms Kitty Jenkins - Dir National Security, FCDO

Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 25 April 2024

The minutes of the Autumn Meeting were approved.

Agenda Item 2 – Matters arising from Previous Meeting

The Impact of late Subject Matter Expert (SME) Input on Publishing Schedules.

A recent (and unusually lengthy) clearance process for a book led to a detailed discussion. Whilst DSM advice on publications was often sought, that advice frequently identified a requirement that potentially sensitive material be checked by Subject Matter Experts.

Unlike FOI requests which had a statutory time limit and a dedicated Secretariat to track them, book clearances were often ad hoc and conducted by expert staff in the periphery of their main duties - and Parliamentary Questions and FOI requests necessarily took priority.

It was felt strongly that it was not the delay in itself which was troubling, rather the lack of communication/updates. It was explained that the publishing industry operated many months in advance both in terms of physical printing and reserving shelf space and advanced publicity for new titles. Late changes or reprints could come at significant financial cost.

The Chairman agreed that such delays were rare, but undermined trust, and as this was an MoD matter invited the MoD member to write to the relevant department to highlight the potential impact. The Chairman noted that aiming for the usual seven-week timescale for such clearances should remain the aim, but was happy that long delays should be brought to the Committee's attention and the Official side should investigate where necessary.

Action: MoD member

He further pointed out that where SMEs were overwhelmed with requests for disclosure they must, perforce, prioritise those which came from Court, or with similar standing (such as Lord Justice Haddon Cave's Inquiry into extra-judicial killings in Afghanistan).

Promotion of the Incorporation of Counter-Terrorism Policing (CTP) into the DSMA Notice System. The Secretary outlined the steps he had taken to promote the incorporation of CTP, namely by:

Updating the standing notices on the website.

Sending an information note to all Committee members to assist in any briefings to their organizations. The Society of Editors helpfully distributed the same through its own network.

Including the incorporation in all briefings to universities, media organizations and Government Departments.

Agenda Item 3 – Secretary’s Report: 19 Oct 2024 – 14 Apr 2025

The Secretary presented his six-monthly report. He pointed out that there had been a particularly small number of requests for advice (40 - the second lowest in 10 years). Of these, 3 were concerned with UK/US intelligence sharing; 3 with SF; 3 with Counter Terrorism Policing. No Supplementary Notices were issued in this period.

There was a discussion about the possible causes, and whilst it was acknowledged that these things came in cycles it was also noted that the highest levels of activity had coincided with high tempo UK operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Although UK forces continued to be deployed throughout the globe there was less focus on those with a lower profile. It was also the case that the news cycle also strongly influenced the focus of media attention. The first 100 days of President Trump’s second term in Office had been turbulent and was felt to be a particularly good example.

Two particular areas of the system working in practice were discussed, both resulting in journalists and their Defence Editors taking the view that to avoid the release of sensitive information the stories should not be published.

The first involved UK service personnel serving overseas where mention of their location might have put them at greater risk from the opposition. The second concerned MACP.

The high profile shooting of Chris Kaba in September 2022 had led to the prosecution for murder of the police officer involved. There was extensive speculation that if he were convicted other firearms officers

would resign from firearms duties. A contingency plan was prepared and an army unit placed on standby. There was some concern that tensions might be ignited if it were published before it happened although in the end, the police officer concerned was unanimously cleared of murder.

Agenda Item 4 – Cyber and Counter-Terrorism Policing (CTP) Update

The Committee had directed that the Secretary should monitor and report on Cyber and Counter Terrorism Policing.

Cyber.

The Secretary noted that since the incorporation of Cyber in 2021 into the standing notices, there had only been 14 requests for advice and these had largely been non-contentious and had not required DSM advice. Indeed the National Cyber Security Centre was concerned with encouraging all users to adopt the best practices of defensive cyber.

The Chairman re-iterated that the Committee neither would nor should ever try to interfere with the publication of anything simply because it might embarrass the government of the day or government departments.

The potential concern about reporting on offensive cyber was that just as with other military operations, publicity could potentially have a negative impact on mission success and potentially put those involved at risk.

CTP.

It was agreed that the painstaking work and caution with which CTP had been incorporated into the standing notices, had been vindicated. It was clear that it was now understood that Cyber and CTP were in scope in the standing notices, but there had neither been a slew of issues, nor was there any sign of 'creep' into mainstream police business, which had been a primary concern.

Although CTP had been included in the notices for only a short time, the Secretary had no concerns with the two requests for advice he had received.

There was a discussion about the definition of Terrorism (essentially relying on the 2000 Act), and it was noted that the UK's scope was wider

than many other nations. The definition had become a matter of national debate because of recent high-profile murders, but the declaration was a matter for the national CTP command.

With the agreement of the local constabulary, CTP often brought its additional resources to bear and assumed command in the early stages whilst determining whether an incident was terrorism; relinquishing command if and when CTP decided it was not. An important distinction needed to be drawn between connections to terrorist organisations and acts of terrorism.

The Committee directed that the Secretary continue to monitor and report on these topics as a standing agenda item.

Agenda Item 5 – Operational Update

The MOD member gave an Operational update.

Although this is not usually minuted, it is worth highlighting the historic, recently commenced global deployment of HMS Prince of Wales and her Carrier Battle Group east of Suez, especially in the context of the involvement throughout of bilateral allied Naval vessels. It was a whole UK effort and involved the FCDO and Department for trade and Industry.

Other UK operations and deployed force elements were covered and the FCDO and Home Office members also spoke.

Agenda Item 6 – Any Other Business

Summary of Secretary's Report. The Committee approved the customary digest of requests for advice for publication on the website.

Reception. Members were reminded that a Reception would be held on 11 June in Admiralty House. Invitations would be sent out shortly.

Naming Diplomatic Staff. There was a discussion about a request to the BBC not to name diplomatic staff who had been asked to prematurely depart the Country to which they were accredited. The FCDO member explained that this was customary for more junior staff on welfare grounds as the additional publicity was likely to put them under increased pressure at an already difficult time. This often reflected a reciprocal mutual understanding with host countries about not naming one another's expelled staff.

Agenda Item 7 – Date of Next Meeting

The next DSMA Committee meeting is planned to take place at 1800 on Thursday 13 November 2025. It will be preceded immediately by the media-side pre-meeting, which will begin at the usual time of 1700 and be followed by the annual dinner at the RAF Club.

Geoffrey Dodds
Brigadier (Retired), Secretary
Defence and Security Media Advisory Committee

21 May 2025

Distribution:

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