

**MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD IN THE MINISTRY
OF DEFENCE IN HISTORIC ROOM 13 AT 6PM ON
THURSDAY 13 NOVEMBER 2025**

**THE DEFENCE AND SECURITY MEDIA ADVISORY
COMMITTEE**

D/DSMA/3/2/1

The following were present:

Mr Gareth Martin (MOD)
Mr Adam Trigg (FCDO)
Ms Liz Wright (Home Office)

Mr John Battle (Vice-Chairman)
Ms Dawn Alford
Mr Ian Brunskill
Ms Caroline Cummins
Mr Andrew Dagnell
Mr David Dillon
Mr Joe Fay
Mr James Green
Mr David Higgerson
Mr David Jordan
Mr Jack Lefley
Mr Ben Lowry
Mr John McLellan
Ms Sayra Tekin
Ms Sarah Whitehead

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:

Mr Paul Wyatt (Chairman), Mr Matthew Collins, Ms Kitty Jenkins, Ms Katharine Costello, Mr Paul Kunert, Ms Eilidh Wilson, Ms Lisa Mitchell, Mr Robert Winnett, and Ms Joy Yates

As the Chairman was at the NATO summit in Berlin with the Defence Secretary, Mr Gareth Martin assumed the role of Acting Chairman. He welcomed the return of Ms Wright in her role as the Deputy Director, National Security at the Home Office and welcomed Ms Cummins, Director Policy and Public Affairs at the Publishers Association to her first meeting.

Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 29 April 2025

The minutes of the Spring Meeting were approved.

Agenda Item 2 – Matters arising from Previous Meeting

1. The Acting Chairman was pleased to confirm that the book for publication which had been so long delayed had now been cleared by MoD's subject matter experts as amended and would be published in February.
2. Although considerably beyond the usual seven-week target timescale for such clearances it was confirmed that there had not been a systemic failure but that there were real issues of security which needed to be addressed and that the author knew that some of his material was controversial.
3. The Secretariat should continue to monitor these clearances and highlight any delay of concern to the Committee as appropriate.

Agenda Item 3 – Secretary's Report: 15 Apr – 27 Oct

4. The Secretary presented his six-monthly report. He pointed out that there had been an improved number of requests for advice (59), more than for the previous period (40), and only marginally below the 10-year historical average (68).
5. The Secretary highlighted the sinus rhythm of the number of requests for advice which defied scientific analysis, but did mention an increasing instance of members of Special Forces compromising their anonymity intentionally, and speculated that this might be related to

recent prosecutions in Northern Ireland harking back to ‘the Troubles’ and the ongoing Public Inquiry into alleged extra-judicial killing in Afghanistan.

6. No Supplementary Notices were issued in this period.

7. Three particular areas of the system working in practice were discussed, all resulting in journalists and their Defence Editors taking the view that to avoid the release of sensitive information the stories should not be published, or potentially harmful detail omitted.

a. The first involved an inadvertent release of the sensitive personal information of a large number of Afghan nationals seeking assistance under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP). Although the journalist at the time had taken the DSMA advice not to publish, that matter came to light on the expiry of the now well-publicized super-injunction. The Acting Chairman highlighted the fact that the legal route had been followed because so many lives were potentially at risk, but that it was the learned judge who had granted a super-injunction rather than the injunction applied for. Throughout the laser-focus had been on protecting life and the period for which the injunction had been in force had allowed the majority of those potentially put at risk to be moved to safety. The Secretary stressed that the purpose of his raising this particular event was to reassure committee members that the secretariat had offered DSMA advice in the normal way and had not been involved in subsequent discussions nor in the application process for the injunction.

b. The second involved the Security of RAF Airfields following the Palestine Action assault on RAF Brize Norton in June. The photographs taken by investigative journalists and the imagery and locations displayed on google earth showed a significant number of vulnerable points on the perimeters of RAF airfields. In addition to the obvious implications for operational security, publication or broadcast would create a threat to families accommodated within the airfield perimeter. The Secretary advised against publication of flimsy fences or simply vegetation and their specific locations on airfield perimeters because this would likely aid an adversary considering any future repetition of a Brize Norton-styled assault on an airfield. Although the article was published the editor agreed to withhold the airfield names, their locations and the vulnerable sections on the imagery.

c. The final issue involved Intelligence Agency methods and techniques. There was considerable public interest in the failure to prosecute two British nationals for spying for China. The journalist's article focussed on the methods and techniques of how the agencies gathered intelligence to support the allegations. The Secretary advised the journalist not to publish any of the methods or techniques. Following a subsequent draft and further comment, the journalist accepted the advice. The article was not published.

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

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

9. The Secretary noted that although there had been no formal requests for advice on either of these newly-incorporated areas, he gave two examples of recent CTP activity which should reassure the Committee that the secretariat and CTP both took the matter seriously and understood the scope – and importantly, the limits – of the DSMA system's applicability.

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

Agenda Item 5 – Operational Update

11. The Acting Chairman, as MOD member, gave an Operational update. Although this item is not usually minuted, it is worth highlighting continued significant effort in support of Ukraine, both in terms of training and provision of materiel, as well as the global deployment of HMS Prince of Wales and her Carrier Battle Group east of Suez, now homeward bound - 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.

12. Other UK operations and deployed force elements in support of allies were covered (including the UK's anti-drone capability). The FCDO and Home Office members also spoke.

Agenda Item 6 – Any Other Business

13. Secretary's digest for the website

The Committee approved the customary digest of requests for advice for publication on the website.

14. Police and Crime Bill

a. The Vice Chairman briefly articulated the concerns of the Media side which had been discussed in detail at the MS pre-meeting. It was understood that the Police and Crime Bill (currently with the House of Lords) contained a new proposal of an assumption of anonymity for Police Firearms Officers.

b. The Media side appreciated that there might be some limited circumstances in which such anonymity might be necessary to protect life (e.g. gang reprisals) but there were already legal protections in place which would allow a judge to grant anonymity if appropriate.

c. It was felt strongly that not only was the change requiring anonymity inappropriate, but that it was highly prejudicial to the principles of policing by consent where it was essential in the public interest that police officers – especially those with the heavy responsibility of potentially using lethal force in the protection of others – be held fully to account. Automatic anonymity was potentially injurious to public justice and transparency.

d. The Media side were troubled that their representations to the Home Secretary on this issue had received no response. The Home Office member acknowledged these concerns and undertook to investigate. The Acting Chairman asked that this issue be specifically noted in the Agenda of the Spring meeting.

Action: Home Office Member; Secretary

15. Defence Intelligence and Ukraine

a. There was a discussion about the unprecedented release for publication of UK Defence Intelligence during the War in Ukraine.

Official side members highlighted that in the same way as social media had accelerated the news cycle, it had made misinformation as part of Information Warfare much more powerful. Providing facts to those who were committed to accuracy in their reporting was a highly effective way of countering malicious misinformation.

b. Sharing this information had an amplifying effect in building consensus and helped influence the foreign policies of other countries by increasing trust in the UK and allies.

c. In the same way, those nations with sophisticated Intelligence capabilities like the UK assisted allies and partners in a force-multiplying way, both by sharing analysis and building other nations' own capabilities.

16. Intelligence Agency overreach

Two cases under formal review by the Investigatory Powers Commission. The Committee agreed that whilst the detail of investigations into the Intelligence Agencies must remain classified, trust in the accountability of the Agencies depended entirely on the rigour of these investigations. It was reassuring that these matters were being treated with the seriousness they merited.

17. Remembrance.

a. In the week of the Armistice Day acts of Remembrance, the Committee took a moment to reflect on the fallen and those who placed themselves in harm's way to protect the nation.

b. Both the Acting Chairman and the Vice Chairman welcomed the unique nature of this forum which brought together Media and Official side members and enabled matters of concern to be raised frankly and in detail as had been demonstrated today.

Agenda Item 7 Date of the Next Meeting

18. The next DSMA Committee meeting is planned to take place at 1800 on Thursday 30 April 2026. It will be preceded immediately by the media-side pre-meeting, which will begin at the usual time of 1700. Following the meeting there will be a historical presentation in the King Henry VIII wine cellar and light refreshments.

Geoffrey Dodds

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

Distribution:

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