MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE IN HISTORIC ROOM 13 AT 6PM ON TUESDAY 25 APR 2023

THE DEFENCE AND SECURITY MEDIA ADVISORY COMMITTEE

D/DSMA/3/2/1

The following were present:

Mr Gareth Martin (Acting Chairman)Mr David Jordan (Acting Vice-Chairman)
Mr Rod Latham (Cabinet Office)Mr Ian Brunskill
Ms Catrin Thomas (FCDO)Mr Peter Clifton
Mr Tom Murphy (Home Office)Mr Joe Fay
Mr Paul Kunert
Ms Lisa Mitchell
Mr Charles Redmayne
Ms Sayra Tekin
Ms Sarah Whitehead
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

The following provided apologies for absence:

Mr Paul Wyatt, Mr John Battle, Ms Dawn Alford, Mr Jonathan Sinclair, Mr James Green, Mr David Higgerson, Mr Michael Jermey, Mr David Dillon, Mr John McLellan, Ms Eilidh Wilson

1. Mr Gareth Martin took the role of Acting Chairman, and Mr David Jordan took the role of Acting Vice Chairman. Both welcomed the Secretary on his return from convalescence, and welcomed Sayra Tekin (Legal Director, News Media Association) to her first meeting. Welcomes on joining the Committee were also extended to Ian Brunskill (Associate Editor Times and Sunday Times). The Acting Chairman also welcomed Tom Murphy from the Home Office, representing Jonathan Sinclair.

Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Thu 10 Nov 2022

2. The minutes of the Autumn meeting on 10 Nov 2022 were approved.

Agenda Item 2 – Matters arising from previous Meeting

3. These matters were dealt with as their own agenda item

Agenda Item 3 - Secretary's Report: 27 Oct 22 -10 Apr 23

4. The Secretary's report contained fewer ROA serials than the previous period (although it should be noted that it is closed a few weeks in advance of the meeting and the civil war in Sudan and the Non-combatant Evacuation Operations are thus not reflected).

5. Dep Sec 1 noted that the number of items was less significant as a metric than the extreme sensitivity (in national security terms) of some of the material which had been protected from inadvertent disclosure. He stated that some of this had been of the most sensitive nature he had seen since joining the Secretariat.

6. It was noted that although no supplementary notices had been issued in the period, this was also positive, since the issue of these notices inevitably meant that sensitive information had not been contained at an earlier stage.

7. Two recent examples were provided of the system in action.

<u>SPI</u>

a. An Intelligence Agency had an incident involving a foreign national. Although technically neither foreign nationals nor information management fall within the DSMA ambit, it was felt that the safety of the individual was a priority and the advice was to protect the name, which was accepted. Although some information emerged into the public domain over subsequent weeks, the potential risk to the individual was minimised.

b. This incident demonstrated the effectiveness of the open channel and reservoir of trust built up over time between the Secretariat and interlocutors on both sides.

<u>Current Ops</u>

a. A journalist had discovered the identity of a small unit about to deploy on operations overseas.

b. Although the journalist had made the decision not to publish in order to avoid the possibility of increasing risk to the individuals concerned, he did make some cogent points. The presence of UK force elements in the region was being treated with discretion by the UK but was widely known in country, it was part of a very large international coalition effort, and there was open source evidence to prove it.

c. The availability online of commercially available overhead imagery as well as photographs and videos with tracking data meant information previously the preserve of national intelligence effort was freely available to all in real time. Unlike the citizen observer the professional journalist was both trained and committed to standards of truth and even-handedness by which the amateur was not bound. In this context there was a balance to be struck in terms of secrecy and comment.

8. The acting Vice Chairman made the point that it is increasingly difficult to keep secrets in the current media environment and the Committee noted the increasing speed of the news cycle with near instantaneous posting on Social Media, and the increasing globalisation of news. Protecting information truly harmful to national security or which risked lives was the priority.

Agenda Item 4 – Relationship with Regulators

9. The Secretariat maintains an arms-length relationship with regulator IPSO. The Committee approved the Secretary approaching regulator IMPRESS with a view to opening a similar dialogue. It was agreed that such a loose link was useful to brief/inform editors under the aegis of these regulators. (The Acting Vice Chair noted IMPRESS deals with smaller organisations - precisely those likely to be less familiar with the DSMA system). The start of the tenure of the new CEO of IMPRESS provided the perfect opportunity to commence this engagement.

Agenda Item 5 - Counter Terrorist Policing

10. The acting Secretary outlined the current position on including CT policing in the scope of the DSMA standing notices.

11. Following a report by RUSI observing the overlap in operations and techniques between SF and CT police, the Committee had agreed to examine the seeming anomaly that one set of people and operations were covered by the system, whilst one set was not. Following a presentation and discussion with senior CT police staff at a previous meeting, it had been the Committee's view that a decision could not be reached without further evidence. Operational pressures had prevented CT police providing evidence ahead of the Spring meeting, and more time had been requested.

12. The matter would be tabled for the next meeting. The acting Chairman asked that an update on progress be provided in the interim.

Action: Secretary

Agenda Item 6 - National Security Bill

13. Mr Tom Murphy, Deputy Director National Security. Home Office updated the meeting on the progress of the NSB which was now back with the Commons looking at the Lords' amendments. He outlined the key points which the clarification of the scope of offences tended towards protecting journalistic freedoms.

14. The Official Secrets Acts were not being reformed at the same time, and it remained the Government view that a public interest defence was inappropriate.

15. He sought to reassure the meeting that the strong emphasis in the Bill on countering espionage and the explicit emphasis on foreign states meant that it was highly unlikely that a genuine whistleblower would be caught in its net.

16. The next stage would be Royal Assent, the timing of which depended on the Parliamentary timetable.

17. Sayra Tekin noted that she had been extensively involved in the discussions around the drafting of the Bill but stated as a lawyer she would herself advise journalists to exercise caution. Some 'chilling effect' was therefore inevitable.

18. There was a brief discussion. The Acting Vice Chairman acknowledged that the Home Office Representative to the Committee had clearly taken media side concerns on board but noted that whilst all could agree that curtailing espionage was a good thing, there remained the real danger of unintended consequences. He highlighted this forum was probably unique in bringing together official and media side representatives able to engage and discuss this topic frankly and openly.

19. The Acting Chairman requested a short interim note (Rod Latham (Cabinet Office) supported this suggestion).

Action: Home Office

Agenda Item 7 – Diversity and Inclusion

20. The Second Deputy Secretary presented a brief paper on Diversity and Inclusion. He suggested that the national debate had moved into an emotive space and there would be merit in stepping back from the current discussion in order not to get drawn into increasingly vituperative exchanges on issues not directly relevant to the Committee's work, including: colonialism and identity.

21. The Committee agreed that less frequent reporting was appropriate but the topic needed to remain prominent in the thoughts of members. There was an engaged discussion which noted that where possible, opportunities to increase diversity had been taken when positions on the Committee were to be filled. Many posts, however, particularly on the official side, were 'ex officio'. Every organisation represented was working to make progress in this area, and ultimately, because the membership reflected the senior echelons of the organisations represented, it would take time for the initiatives of today to effect a change - particularly as the organisations represented were making slow progress in getting people from more diverse backgrounds into senior positions.

22. The Committee also noted that a very important element of Inclusion related to socio economic background and regional representation. The 2nd Dep Sec was tasked to prepare and circulate before the next meeting a suitable anonymous survey which would allow the Committee to take an audit of the diversity of its current membership as a base line for future reference.

Action: Dep Sec 2

Agenda Item 8 - Visits to Security Organisations

23. There was widespread agreement that the visits programme had been interesting and valuable, but consideration should be given to timing and frequency. A visit to the National Security Cyber centre was planned for late May early June.

Action: Dep Sec 1

Agenda Item 9 – Any Other Business

Cyber

24. In light of the inclusion of Cyber in the scope of the Standing Notices, Mr Joe Fay suggested that there might be merit in arranging a DSMA briefing aimed specifically at an IT audience and there would be a good opportunity to do this in the margins of the INFOSEC Conference 21-22 June.

25. There was a wide-ranging discussion about the potential impact of fast-emerging, non-linear technology on the field of journalism and the future work of the Committee. This topic would require some thought and might be tabled for a future Agenda Item.

26. The Committee noted that AI such as Chat GPT was becoming increasingly convincing and this greatly boosted the capacity for spreading misinformation since the AI hoovered up content indiscriminately. Indeed, a German journalist had recently admitted using AI to 'generate' an interview with Michael Schumacher.

27. Before long, sophisticated technical information would be readily available for anyone to access and include in content regardless of their own training or background. At the same time self-publishing would see a tide of material produced, printed, distributed, and publicised without any editorial oversight of ethics or veracity.

Six Monthly Summary

28. The Committee approved the publication on the website of the 'digest' of the Secretary's report on the last six months.

Agenda Item 10 – Date of Next Meeting

29. The next meeting would take place at 1800 on 31 October. It would immediately be preceded by the Media Side pre-meeting at 1700 and would be followed by the Annual Dinner at the RAF Club.

Geoffrey Dodds
Brigadier, Secretary
Defence and Security Media Advisory Committee 5 May 2023

Distribution:
All DSMA Committee Members
The DSMA Website

SUMMARY OF SECRETARY'S REPORT TO THE DSMA COMMITTEE COVERING ACTIVITIES DURING THE PERIOD 27 OCT 22 - 10 April 23

Defence and Security media advice was sought on 37 occasions during this reporting period, a decrease over the previous period (47) and below the recent Autumn / Winter trend (50 over the last 3 years). Ten requests were initiated by the media, 11 by Government officials and 16 from members of the public.

The number of requests for advice on particular topics included:

UK Special Forces	3	Counter-Terrorism	1
Intelligence Agencies	6	Physical Property & Assets	0
Cyber	0	DSMA Notice System	4
Current & Recent Military Ops	6	Historical	7
Military Equipment	2	Miscellaneous	8
Nuclear Weapons	0		

The Secretary briefed the Committee that the recently incorporated cyber amendments to the DSMA standing notices had not been used in formulating advice nor in the issuance of supplementary notices over the last 18 months.

National Security Bill: The Home Office member updated the Committee on the progress of the National Security Bill.

Relationship with Regulators. As directed, the Secretary briefed IMPRESS on the work of the Committee and offered briefings to editorial teams on the DSMA system and on national security implications of particular matters.

Incorporation of CT Policing within the DSMA Notice System. This item will be discussed at the Committee's next meeting Autumn 23.

During this period, the Committee's Secretariat:

- Briefed Australian Defence and Security officials
- Briefed members of the News and editorial team from BFPS.
- Participated in the annual Society of Editors Conference with the Deputy Secretary (1) on 15 March 23.
- Undertook 6 Briefings to Universities.