

9/31/F

PR

Reference. 2ndPUS/483/82

65

55/3/5

PUS

Copies to: PS/Secretary of State
MA/CDS
AUS (D Staff)
CPR
Sec. DPBC

FREDERICK FORSYTH: BOOK ON THE FALKLANDS CRISIS

Your office has asked for advice on Sir Robert Armstrong's letter to you of 28 June.

2. The general opinion of all whom I have consulted follows the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State in welcoming this proposal, though we will of course have to lay down some fairly careful guidelines.

3. In his letter Armstrong proposed a meeting with yourself, CDS and Sir Antony Acland. I enclose a draft reply indicating a general welcome for the proposal and that, as I hope MA/CDS will confirm, you and CDS would be glad to join in an early meeting.

4. I also attach a background note which you might find useful for the meeting.

not yet fixed but will be
PUS/82/833

AP/A

2nd PUS

5 July 1982

BACKGROUND NOTE FOR PROPOSED MEETING WITH SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

The proposals for a book by Frederick Forsyth demonstrates the painstaking research which is typical of this author. There is probably little doubt that, given the right degree of official assistance, his book is not only likely to be the best selling one but also the best written one.

Other Requests

Many requests have already been received from a variety of journalists and authors for varying degrees of assistance to enable books to be written. All those who have asked have so far been given either a letter rejecting their application for access to official papers or a holding reply along the lines that it is too early for us to say to what extent we shall be able to assist. A number of books are already on the stocks, with or without official assistance. These include books by Max Hastings and two members of the "Insight" team of the Sunday Times.

Criterion for Assistance

We would recommend that the policy on assisting authors should be, as far as possible, an even-handed one. We could not recommend an exclusive arrangement with Mr. Forsyth or any other author. It is proposed that we should evaluate the degree of assistance to each author before deciding whether or not to give facilities requested. The main criterion for starting discussions with any author should be the existence of a letter from a publisher commissioning an author. This will at least avoid the time-wasting effort of helping authors who have a gleam in their eye to write a book but with no guarantee of publication.

The Problem of Security

It is accepted that if Mr. Forsyth, and other well known authors, are given official blessing to talk to members of the Task Force for the purposes of a book, there will have to be very clear guidance issued both to the authors and to those with whom they are put in touch over particularly sensitive areas. It would be a condition of all assistance that the resulting manuscript must be seen by MOD before publication to guard against inadvertent publication of security matters which would be the subject of the D Notice procedures.

In the case of the Falklands we believe that the particular areas of sensitivity, about which authors and members of the Task Force should be warned include the operations involving our submarines, the monitoring of Argentine communications, intelligence gathering and assessment, electronic countermeasures, detailed descriptions of missile guidance systems and certain activities of the SAS and SBS which go beyond the role of probing and reconnoitring.