

FREDERICK FORSYTH'S SAGA

1. It is quite clear from FLAG L that Sir Antony Acland thinks it is a mistake to cooperate with Mr Forsyth. One can see many good reasons for not doing so. They seem to me to fall into the following general categories:

a. Pre-empting Formal Enquiries. This is probably of more concern to politicians than it is to officials but the PM has already expressed a degree of enthusiasm for the project. As far as military aspects are concerned, we would obviously not wish to make pre-judgements on weapons systems effectiveness, operating procedures and so on before they have been thoroughly studied but I think we should be able to help him with the facts which form the staple of his literary style. Eg, "streaking out 3,000 metres in the crystal clear Arctic air the Rapiere missile guided by its 26 year old Royal Artillery operator, sped on to impact itself behind the rear spoiler of the 10 year old Mirage 3". I think he will be less concerned about kill ratios, precise deployments etc than this sort of gripping detail.

b. Preserving Confidentiality. Our main problem will lie in avoiding giving too much away about: sensitive operations, intelligence sources, decision making and weapons systems design. The trouble is, that where he is not given the information, he is bound to speculate. Such speculation might be amazingly accurate, particularly if some of those we suggest he consults are indiscreet or he is clever enough to wheedle the information by pretending he has heard half of it from others. If his suppositions are accurate, then it would be difficult to suppress them. If they are inaccurate, it would be inappropriate to deny them because, in doing so, the remainder of the book is authenticated. He might agree to have his final manuscript vetted but this will lend it the stamp of authority which could well be undesirable.

c. Keeping faith with the Author. It is difficult to see what we could offer Mr Forsyth which could be denied to others, even temporarily. If we do suggest contacts for him then he might well try to persuade them to enter into an exclusive arrangement with him. I see no great danger in this but it is obviously not entirely desirable. If we forbid such deals then he might find his book being gradually exposed before publication.

2. In spite of all this, I think it would be worth trying to help him - but not necessarily for nothing! If your Mandarin colleagues agree then I suggest that he has a chat with a senior officer concerned in the operations who is authorised to do some horse-trading with him on the military aspects of the book before he gets underway. When he has produced an outline of the episodes he wishes to cover; then we can suggest appropriate personalities and brief them accordingly.