

**CONFIDENTIAL**Prime Minister.

The Home Secretary agrees that the proposed study should be undertaken, though with no lively hope that it will produce anything. I fear his pessimism will prove justified. But it is probably worth the attempt even so.

Do you agree to the study and if so, to the terms of reference attached? Do you want to mention the study at a meeting of Cabinet as Sir Ian Bannister suggests?

John  
17.

MR C A WHITMORE

## LEAKS

I have recently been considering with Sir Robert Armstrong and Sir Brian Cubbon the case for commissioning a study of unauthorised disclosures of information to the Press. A number of such leaks have of course been the subject of specific enquiries, but the reports of these seldom do more than suggest the most likely explanation for the leak and make recommendations for tightening particular areas of document security within a Department.

2. It would be wrong to regard the holding of such enquiries representing time wholly wasted. At the very least the existence of the leak drill is necessary to plug any gaps in our security arrangements, and the knowledge that enquiries are held may well provide some sort of deterrent to a proportion of people who might otherwise be tempted to be deliberately disloyal.

3. The time may well have come however for us to review the adequacy of the leak procedure itself in present day circumstances.

4. The growth of so called investigative journalism and the proliferation of lobbies and pressure groups which can readily command the interest of the media has created a climate which I suspect positively encourages disclosure by an individual who holds strong personal convictions on an issue currently under consideration within central Government and who sees a way of furthering the cause he supports without being detected. These misguided people represent I suspect a much more serious threat to the security of Government documents than those who are motivated by extremist political views.

5. It is these areas I would suggest we should explore by reviewing the reports of recent leak enquiries, and by seeking to establish any common patterns which may emerge from such an examination. The study might entail interviewing again some of those involved in past leak enquiries and also the officers who undertook those investigations.

6. What I have in mind is reflected in the attached draft terms of reference for any individual undertaking the study.

7. The work would call for somebody who knows Whitehall and has the status to open the necessary doors. Preferably he should have some personal experience of leak enquiry procedures. Above all, he needs to have the subtlety of mind to analyse a quantity of disparate material and to decide whether lessons can be derived from such a synoptic view. A retired Permanent Secretary may well be the most suitable choice.



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8. I am bound to confess that if the Prime Minister were to approve this study we may find it ultimately adds little to what we already know. Nevertheless, my own judgment and that of my two colleagues is that the attempt is worth making.

9. I would be grateful if you could take the Prime Minister's mind on this. Apart from sending copies of this minute to the two Permanent Secretaries whom I have already consulted, I am sending a copy only to the Home Secretary in view of his responsibilities for the Police and Security Service. If the Prime Minister decided to authorise the study, then she might think it right that her decision should be communicated to colleagues orally at a Cabinet meeting. I would adopt a similar oral briefing of those of my Permanent Secretary colleagues who needed to know.

IAB

IAN BANCROFT

15 January 1980



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## DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. To examine -
  - i. the reports of leak enquiries since May 1979;
  - and ii. the material available in CSD and Departments on leaks which were not the subject of formal leak procedure.
2. To take such further evidence from Departments and from enquiry officers as may be necessary.
3. To report on any factors which appear to be sufficiently common to a number of recent leaks as to justify further examination and consideration in particular of:
  - a. whether existing procedures for the handling, reproduction and protection of sensitive material need further tightening, and if so by what specific measures;
  - b. whether the existing procedures for dealing with apparent unauthorised disclosures of sensitive information are still appropriate to current circumstances, and if not in what ways they should be altered.

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