

3 The Media on the Rock: the Media and the Gibraltar Killings¹

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INTRODUCTION

'They were challenged by, it appears, plain-clothed policemen . . . Then the shoot-out happened' (BBC1, 21.00 6 March 1988).

'A fierce gun battle broke out' (ITN, 21.15, 6 March 1988).

'A 500-pound car bomb close to the Governor's residence' (ITN, 12.30, 7 March 1988).

'Army explosives experts used a robot to defuse the bomb' (ITN, 12.30 7 March 1988).

'A 500-pound bomb was later defused' (*Guardian*, 7 March 1988).

'One of them was a woman and they were both armed' (*Today*, 7 March 1988).

'They were armed' (*Sun*, 7 March 1988).

The Gibraltar shootings of three members of the Irish Republican Army, Mairead Farrell, Danny McCann and Seán Savage, occurred at approximately 15.41 hours on Sunday, March 6 1988. The shootings were carried prominently in all parts of the British media on the Sunday night and Monday morning. These reports included statements, such as those above, which were simply untrue. The members of the IRA unit were shot not by 'police' but by the SAS. A 500-pound car bomb (or a bomb of any other size) had not been found, nor had this non-existent bomb been defused by 'explosives experts' or even by 'robots'. There was no 'shoot-out' or 'fierce gun battle' because, in fact, Farrell, McCann and Savage were not armed.

'BOMB GANG'?²

The first official comment from the MoD in London came at 16.45. They confirmed 'a suspected bomb found in Gibraltar and three suspects shot by civilian police'.³ The first British TV news bulletins, on BBC and ITN, following the MoD statement, reported that 'police' did the shooting. But at this stage they are unsure about the existence of a bomb. The BBC reported: 'Three suspected terrorists believed to be Irish have been shot dead tonight by police in Gibraltar... A search of the main street is under way following a report that a bomb had been planted near a public hall, but it's not known if that report was genuine' (18.25, 6 March 1988).

Five minutes later ITN repeated this account, speaking of 'a bomb alert in the centre of the town' (18.30, 6 March 1988).

At 21.00 the MoD said that 'security forces were involved in the shootings and that military personnel dealt with a suspect bomb'. The MoD statement came too late for the BBC 21.00 bulletin and they continued to refer to 'police' rather than 'British soldiers'. Nevertheless, they were much more certain about what had happened: 'Police in Gibraltar have shot dead three suspected Irish terrorists. They've also defused a car bomb... It was said to have 500 pounds of explosives packed inside. Official sources said the bomb appeared to have been prepared to go off on Tuesday... They were challenged by, it appears, plain-clothed policemen... Then the shoot-out happened' (BBC1, 21.00, 6 March 1988).

ITN, fifteen minutes later, incorporated the MoD statement, but otherwise their account was substantially the same. At 22.00 that night officials in Gibraltar confirmed to the *Gibraltar Chronicle* that the suspect car had been 'towed away and there has been no confirmation of the story that it held 500 pounds of explosives' (7 March 1988).

At 09.00 the following morning the MoD in London continued to say 'a suspected bomb has been dealt with'. However, at 15.30 Geoffrey Howe said in the House of Commons that no bomb had been found and that the three IRA members were unarmed. At 16.00 'the Governor of Gibraltar continues to tell reporters a bomb has been defused'.

On Monday 7 March all eleven British national daily newspapers reported the story that a bomb had been found. Many gave detailed information about the size (mostly 500 pounds), purpose and type of the bomb as well as how it was defused. The *Daily Mail* suggested

that the bomb might have a 'video timing device', while *Today* and the *Independent* mentioned 'remote control'. The *Daily Mirror* told us that 'a controlled explosion failed to set off the bomb' whilst the *Daily Mail* added 'RAF disposal men defused it later'.

Writing in *Granta* (no. 25, p. 2), Ian Jack explains how the MoD account can be seen as technically accurate:

There is a strong temptation here, a temptation to use the word 'lie'. Writer (and reader) resist it. According to the Ministry of Defence, the phrase 'suspect bomb' or 'suspect car bomb' is 'a term of art'. As the army's bomb disposal officer explained to the inquest it means no more than a car which, for whatever reason, is thought to contain a bomb. Hence you 'find' a suspect bomb by finding a car and suspecting it. Hence you 'deal with' a suspect bomb either by confirming its presence and defusing or exploding it, or by discovering that no bomb exists.

The subtleties of the MoD statements on that Sunday night (a 'quiet' news day) were lost on the media, and on the Armed Forces minister Ian Stewart. The next morning he was repeating 'there was a car bomb found, which has been defused' (BBC radio 4, *Today*, 7 March 1988). According to Ian Jack the story about the size of the bomb was gleaned by reporters from the 'gossip of excited Gibraltar policemen' (*Granta*, no. 25, p. 22). It is not clear whether they were speaking with authority. But some official statements were premised on the existence of a bomb. One BBC journalist reported: 'Official sources said the bomb appeared to have been prepared to go off on Tuesday' (BBC, 21.00, 6 March 1988).

One journalist argued that this story dominated the media because: 'The immediate reaction is – the Government says there is a big bomb, it's Sunday, you can't get hold of anybody in the press office. Hacks across the Mediterranean are being woken up from their siestas. Basically, you go on whatever you've got.'

'FIND EVIL EVELYN'

On Tuesday 8 March, the day after Geoffrey Howe's announcement in the Commons, the tabloids focused attention on the 'Fourth Bomber'. In articles headed 'Hunt for IRA Evelyn' (*Sun*), 'Sister of Blood' (*Daily Record*) and 'Find Evil Evelyn' (*Daily Mirror*), Evelyn

Glenholmes was named as being hunted by police throughout Europe over her alleged involvement in the 'Gibraltar Bomb Plot'.

Glenholmes has been Fleet Street's 'most wanted terrorist' for several years. She was first named by Scotland Yard in 1984, appearing in the papers as the 'Terror Blonde in jeans' (*Daily Mail*, 13 November 1984) and the 'Blonde Bomber' (*Evening Standard*, 12 November 1984). After an unsuccessful extradition attempt in Dublin in 1986 the papers obtained several photographs of 'Evil Evelyn' which replaced the artist's impression released by the police two years earlier. They showed, among other things, that Glenholmes was not, in fact, blonde. These photographs have been appearing periodically ever since, for example, with the caption 'Angel of Death' in the *Star* of 11 January 1988. They resurfaced on 8 March 1988. Their significance was illustrated when *Irish Press* columnist John McEntee reported witnessing the 'creation of a little bit of history' in Gibraltar's Holiday Inn, 'the invention of Evelyn Glenholmes as the missing fourth IRA member in Gibraltar'. McEntee asked a 'colourful colleague if he believed the theory of the fourth man. "Oh, it's a woman and we are saying it's Evelyn Glenholmes," this craggy veteran explained. Why on earth, I wondered aloud, was he saying it was Glenholmes. "Because," he replied, "we have a nice picture of her and she won't sue"' (16 March 1988).⁴

'DEATH ON THE ROCK'

Thames Television decided to investigate the shootings. On 28 April 1988 Geoffrey Howe asked Lord Thomson of the IBA to postpone the resulting programme 'until after the inquest in Gibraltar'. The IBA refused. The programme was accused by Tom King and much of the press of conducting a 'trial by television' and prompted Mrs Thatcher to comment that 'trial by TV or guilt by accusation is the day that freedom dies'. The programme makers thought that they were wrongly accused. David Elstein, Director of Programmes at Thames TV, argued that much of the programme was taken up with 'outlining quite clearly the terrible effects that the planned explosion would have had. We revealed that while the IRA's political wing was claiming the Enniskillen bombing was a tragic accident, the IRA was already planning Gibraltar' (*The Sunday Times*, 8 May 1988).

In his enquiry into the programme Lord Windelsham endorsed this view, emphasising 'the hostile editorial stance of the programme

towards the IRA and its methods' (Windelsham and Rampton 1989, p. 24). Remarkably Windelsham also revealed that *This Week* had interviewed Gerry Adams, President of Sinn Féin, for the programme but that they had decided not to use the interview in the programme because it 'would give the IRA a propaganda platform that could not be justified' (Windelsham and Rampton 1989, p. 20).

Geoffrey Howe also tried to stop the BBC broadcasting a programme on the shootings made by BBC Northern Ireland's *Spotlight* team. According to the *Independent* (5 May 1988), he phoned Marmaduke Hussey to 'seek reassurances that the [eyewitness] interviews would not be broadcast'. The programme was broadcast that night.

INSIGHT?

On 1 and 8 May *The Sunday Times* published detailed allegations that the programme 'Death on the Rock' had distorted and omitted evidence which was inconvenient. They claimed that key witnesses shown in it were complaining that 'their views were not accurately reported' and that Thames's evidence was 'crumbling fast' (1 May 1988).

The *Sunday Times* 'Insight' team reported a 'crucial statement' made by the English lawyer Stephen Bullock before he was interviewed for the programme 'when his memory was much fresher'. He had told them 'categorically' that the police car he saw had

'five uniformed officers in it', not plainclothes SAS men. It had pulled up alongside him, perhaps 100 yards away from the garage, as two SAS men travelling on foot had raced along the pavement to the garage. The volley of shots, he said, rang out as the police car turned on its siren and raced towards the petrol station. So Proetta's evidence that the SAS men got out of the car outside the garage and shot the terrorists is contradicted by Bullock. 'Insight' was also given Bullock's account about the terrorists raising their hands... He said McCann's arms were 'outstretched trying to shield himself' and not, as Proetta claims, in surrender (1 May 1988).

One problem in this account is that Bullock and Proetta 'were talking of two different police cars' (*Observer*, 8 May 1988). Another is that the two SAS men that Bullock saw 'were in no way instrumental in the shooting at the Shell petrol station on Winston

Churchill Avenue. Therefore my statement in no way contradicts the evidence given by Miss Proetta' (letter from Stephen Bullock to Roger Bolton, 5 May 1988). A further problem is that Bullock was more than a hundred yards away from the scene and simply 'didn't know' if McCann was surrendering or defending himself (*Sunday Tribune*, 15 May 1988).

'Insight' reported Josie Celecia as saying that Proetta's account was 'ridiculous' and accused the television programme of missing out this inconvenient testimony. But the *Sunday Tribune* reported Celecia as being 'quite distressed' by the *Sunday Times* report. She told them, 'I totally reject suggestions . . . that I described the evidence of Carmen Proetta as ridiculous' (15 May 1988).

'Insight' also consulted Lt-Col George Styles, a former bomb disposal expert who had acted as a consultant for 'Death on the Rock'. He was reported to be an 'angry' man who was writing 'a letter of complaint to Thames Television' with 'a copy . . . to the Prime Minister' (1 May 1988) complaining that two of his views had been missed from the programme. The week after the 'Insight' report of 1 May, the *Observer* reported that Styles had a 'long telephone conversation' with Chris Oxley, the producer of 'Death on the Rock'. He told Oxley, 'you don't have to apologise to me' and that 'the thing which had made him most cross, he said, was the way the press had gone for Carmen Proetta "because, you know, what she said was true"' (8 May 1988).

It was eight months before *The Sunday Times* finally admitted it had been wrong. 'Insight' editor Andrew Hogg wrote: 'It was misleading for *The Sunday Times* to claim that interviews with two eyewitnesses, Stephen Bullock and Josie Celecia, "destroyed" the evidence of a third eyewitness, Carmen' (29 January 1989).

When 'Death on the Rock' was broadcast two *Sunday Times* journalists, Rosie Waterhouse and David Connett, were sent to Gibraltar to reinterview key eyewitnesses. According to one of these reporters, 'I expected that I would be told to investigate further the circumstances of the shootings. However I wasn't. I was told that we were to investigate the making of "Death on the Rock"'. On their return from their second trip to Gibraltar they wrote detailed memos to Robin Morgan, features editor, complaining about the way their copy had been used. David Connett protested that he had been asked to do a 'hatchet job' on 'Death on the Rock'. He pointed out that he had found no evidence to discredit Thames TV; on the contrary, he argued:

the more he investigated, the more questionable the official line became. 'Guidance' supplied by the Ministry of Defence in London, later shown to be false, was accepted at face value by the paper, while attempts were made to discredit civilian witnesses. For example, one of the points in the *Sunday Times* account ... had the effect of trying to undermine ... Carmen Proetta. Mr Connett said he filed the opposite information from Gibraltar and complained that his information had not been used (*Observer*, 15 January 1989).

Rosie Waterhouse complained in her memo that: 'I expressed concern that you [Morgan] seemed to be accepting the official version of the shooting without question. You were not interested in any information I obtained which contradicted your apparent premise – that Thames was wrong and the official version right' (*Observer*, 15 January 1989).

Veteran *Sunday Times* journalist Barrie Penrose also complained. He wrote to Morgan saying: 'In a nutshell, I have seen how facts and witnesses are misused to launch the attack against "This Week".' One *Sunday Times* journalist told me that 'Robin [Morgan] gave me the clearest impression that he wasn't a great regarnder of Julian Manyon's journalistic standards ... I got the impression it was because Robin had worked on an original *Sunday Times* "Insight" story.'

The role of the *Sunday Times* journalists at the inquest was a unique one; they were simply filing a 'verbatim account of the inquest' (Adams et al., 1988, p. iv). This was, according to one *Sunday Times* journalist, in order to 'give Andrew Hogg the opportunity to almost be there. For very real good positive reasons, he had to be in London, because that's where the copy's done. That's where it goes to the paper and that's where Morgan can get his mucky little hands on it.'

Some have argued that *The Sunday Times* had other reasons to attack 'Death on the Rock'. Jolyon Jenkins has written (*New Statesman and Society*, 11 November 1988): 'It's hard to believe that all this is not connected with Rupert Murdoch's satellite interests.' This argument was bolstered when a new 'executive chairman' was appointed to Sky Channel by Murdoch. This was Andrew Neil, who also kept his old job as editor of *The Sunday Times*. At the beginning of December, Andrew Neil gained an assistant at Sky. The six-month secondment went to Jonathan Miller who had edited the *Sunday*

Times media page for eighteen months, covering many stories on broadcasting and deregulation. Others have argued that the connections go deeper than simple economic interest. Murdoch is said by one biographer, Thomas Kiernan, to 'boast privately to friends' of the power he exercises over Thatcher. According to Kiernan, the late editor of *The Times*, Charles Douglas-Home, said in 1984 that 'Rupert and Mrs Thatcher consult regularly on every important matter of policy . . . He is the phantom Prime Minister of the country' (Kiernan, 1986, pp. 310–11).

THE GIBRALTAR INQUEST: 'YOU FIND EVERYONE IS YOUR CLOSEST FRIEND.'⁵

A typical day for journalists in Gibraltar would start when the inquest opened at 10 a.m. Most journalists I spoke to said that because there was so much going on in the court room the bulk of their coverage involved simply reporting the court proceedings as they happened. This left many journalists with, as they saw it, little time and little need to speak to other sources to *generate* stories. But journalists would routinely use other sources to contribute to pieces. The most obvious sources of information for British journalists were the government press officers – one from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and another from the Ministry of Defence. One journalist explained why they would consult the press officers: 'We would always initially go to clear up stuff – stuff that we hadn't fully understood, or just to get clarification of points of evidence that had been given. The second priority was to find out what was the next thing on the schedule and then thirdly probably came under the broad heading of any other news.' Another related that one of the Press Officers 'was in our hotel, so occasionally he would come and have a drink. But we tended not to talk too much about the case. We had a general chat, and if there was any buzz, he'd tell you what the buzz was.'

The Foreign Office press officer at the inquest related: 'you're running a demand-led operation. They need to know you. Once you're identified . . . you find everyone is your closest friend.' Much of this 'operation,' he commented, was 'off the record':

All you could do was caution people. You could say things like you know, 'Well, OK, you've heard that witness, but, don't draw too

many conclusions from that, because you'll find that tomorrow there will be a lot of evidence which will demonstrate that that witness was mistaken. So don't add too much weight to that particular statement.'

Some journalists were reluctant to reveal whom they routinely talked to. This is perhaps not surprising given the relationship that exists between official sources and journalists. This same press officer argued that it was in the journalists' interests not to disclose their sources:

We establish a relationship with people and most of what we do is on a basis of trust . . . If we brief them unattributably then they're not about to completely cut the ground from beneath our feet, because it's not in their interests to do so in the sense that they are hoping that you will be as frank as you possibly can be. If you are very frank with them and they land you in it and report what you've said, clearly they know that the next time you speak to them you're going to be extremely cautious.

Many journalists claimed not to take official sources at face value. They maintained that they would check official guidance with other sources. One journalist commented: 'Well, I think you're always cynical, aren't you? It's a bit different listening to an MoD Press Officer talking about something like this than it is when he's talking about the Duchess of Kent arriving on a parade ground to view the troops.'

A key problem for this system of unattributable briefings is the tendency of journalists to get too close to their sources. Robert Harris has described this tendency as the 'NASA syndrome':

If you are spoon-fed you become dependent. It's rather like being a drug addict. Any group of journalists who become too dependent on any one source of official information end up not writing the truth because, in some subtle way, they end up being drawn into the system . . . For years the space correspondents knew NASA was sending up space shuttles that weren't safe. But they didn't write about it because to write about it would have been to cut themselves off from their main source of information. They had, in effect, become publicists for the American space programme. It can happen to all forms of journalism . . . especially when you have a government that's been in power for ten years – the tendency will be not to bite the hand that feeds you (quoted in Michael Poole, 'No News is Bad News', *The Listener*, 2 February 1989).

As one journalist put it, the press officers in Gibraltar 'were spin-doctors. They were there to give you the best British gloss on the events.'

'WE FOLLOWED THEIR STEPS RIGHT UP TO GIBRALTAR'S GATE.'⁶

From the first reports of the shootings until after the inquest, there were many reports based on official sources. Immediately after the shootings there had been many briefings both on and off the record from the Spanish police and the MoD indicating that the IRA unit had been under constant surveillance all the way to the border. But by the time of the inquest the official story was that the Spanish police had lost Farrell, McCann and Savage at Malaga Airport. One journalist revealed that:

We raised a question over drinks about the Spanish surveillance. They said very strongly that the Spanish would not only testify, but there was an answer for this and we were just going up a blind alley... That would be explained and we would look foolish if we pursued it... It was never explained and it was a very important point. I was on deadline of course, so there was a slight attempt to steer me off... which is, I [suppose], what they get paid to do.

The question of Spanish surveillance was a crucial one and official sources were anxious to demonstrate that they wanted the Spanish police to testify. According to the *Sunday Telegraph* (25 September 1988): 'British officials are making little secret of their frustration at the Spaniards' failure to authorise the police officer to give evidence.'

In the event the Spanish police did not give evidence at the inquest but a statement allegedly from a Spanish policeman was leaked to the *Sunday Telegraph* and *The Sunday Times* (2 October 1988). It later featured in the *Sunday Times* journalists' book *Ambush*: 'The official police report into the incident makes sorry reading and offers no satisfactory explanation: "Both men left the terminal and boarded a taxi, which it was not possible to follow, whilst the woman was lost from sight inside the building due to the number of people there at the time".' (Adams et al., 1988, pp. 148-9).

But, as *Private Eye* was to argue, this was not the official police report. In fact, the document purports to be a witness statement taken by DCI Correa of the Gibraltar police from a Spanish policeman. The policeman, Tomas Rayo Valenzuela, later denied ever having made the statement. 'It's written in English, a language which I neither speak nor understand,' he said (*New Statesman and Society*, 21 April 1989).

When the crown pathologist gave evidence that the shooting of Savage was 'frenzied', it was, according to one 'MoD source', the 'biggest blow we've received so far during the Gibraltar inquest' (*Sunday Telegraph*, 11 September 1988). Some papers that week carried stories reminding readers of what the IRA had done in the past. Others carried stories written by journalists in London, which quoted 'MoD sources' or an 'SAS veteran'. These claimed that the soldiers had not been in a 'frenzy': 'The intention for very specific reasons is to surgically blow his or her brains completely out. Which is why - as the Gibraltar inquest heard yesterday - all three Provos shot dead by the SAS on the Rock all died from head wounds' (*Sun*, 9 September 1988; see also *Sunday Telegraph*, 11 September 1988).

The problem with these accounts is that one of the three, Farrell, died, according to the pathologist, 'as a result of massive internal bleeding' (*Guardian*, 9 September 1988). Another is that Savage was shot in the 'left leg and right and left arms' (*Guardian*, 9 September 1988) before he was shot four times in the head.

The Sunday before the inquest started the *Sunday Telegraph* claimed that 'Only three of the 7-strong SAS team which killed three IRA terrorists in Gibraltar last March actually fired shots, according to military sources... One [SAS man] stopped in a school playground to ensure the safety of children. His colleague caught up with Savage and killed him' (4 September 1988).

This image of the caring SAS man shielding children from danger rather fell apart when SAS men 'C' and 'D' gave evidence. They testified that they had both shot Savage, who received between 16 and 18 wounds.

Before the inquest started. ITN were handed a synopsis of the evidence the SAS men would give in court.⁷ According to one journalist who was involved, it came from 'MoD but I wouldn't like to say any nearer than that'. It was also passed to the *Guardian* which carried it on the front page the next day (6 September 1988). ITN reports from Gibraltar that day were dominated by this document.⁸

In some cases the similarities between the soldiers' statement and the ITN bulletins are striking:

Apparently each body had some nine shots (leaked SAS statement); ITN understands that each was shot about nine times (ITN 22.00, 5 September 1988).

Car was new, but it had an old aerial (leaked SAS statement); The car was new, the radio aerial was old (ITN 22.00, 5 September 1988).

They tried to arrest them at the top of Casemates Hill – something happened which prevented the team from doing so (leaked SAS statement); A decision was taken to arrest them here in Casemates Hill. As the SAS were about to move in, something happened and the attempt was aborted (ITN 13.00, 5 September 1988).

One problem for this account was that part of it was inaccurate. When the pathologists came to testify at the inquest they revealed that Sean Savage had been hit by between 16 and 18 bullets, not nine as the statement has said and ITN had reported.

The only attempt that ITN made to 'balance' the domination of their bulletins by the soldiers' story came in the News at Ten. The newscaster commented: 'Tonight the solicitor representing the IRA bombers' families said he was angry. He said it was a leak to ITN. He said it reinforced his view that the inquest would be extremely unfair' (ITN, 22.00, 5 September 1988). But ITN did not reveal that it was a leak or what its source was.

This document also contained other inaccuracies, which ITN did not repeat. It claimed that 'Witnesses say that what attracted them to look out of their windows was some shouts which preceded the shots.' Of course, at the inquest itself not even the SAS men claimed to have shouted proper warnings and most witnesses said they were attracted to the events either by the shots or by a police siren.

Perhaps more disturbing is the attempt to suggest that Paddy McGrory, the solicitor for the families, was little more than a Provo stooge. At the preliminary hearing in July some papers attempted to smear McGrory. *Today* (6 July 1988), for example, alleged that McGrory was 'effectively promoting the IRA's propaganda war'. McGrory issued writs against the *Sunday Express*, the *Star* and *Today* which were settled out of court for 'more than £225 000' (*Sunday Tribune* 18 February 1990). It is not clear what the source of these stories was. However, when the SAS statement was leaked, it

alleged: 'There are indications that they [the SAS] don't want McGrory to be able to identify them because they suspect he has very strong links with the IRA.'

Some might argue that this attempt to identify McGrory as being linked to the IRA is all the more worrying in the light of the killing by loyalists of Belfast solicitor Pat Finucane in February 1989. This was after junior minister Douglas Hogg had alleged that some solicitors were 'unduly sympathetic' to the IRA.

From the point of view of many British journalists, there wasn't as much reason to speak to McGrory as to official sources. One reason was that McGrory had 'no forewarning of the order of witnesses and no copies of witness statements collected by the police... Only the coroner, Felix Pizzarello, and the lawyers for the Crown and the SAS have had a complete picture of the evidence' (*Fortnight*, October 1988).

So McGrory could not give unattributable briefings on which witnesses would turn up in the next week, because he did not know. As one tabloid journalist commented: 'there really wasn't a lot to be gleaned from McGrory. Their message tended to be rather repetitive.'

Another reason why the British tabloids and some others would seldom speak to McGrory is political. Many British papers simply didn't want to know the other side of the story. McGrory himself has commented that 'the remarkable thing about the English tabloid journalists on Gibraltar was that not one directly approached him' (*Sunday Press*, 26 March 1989). As one Belfast-based journalist put it: 'The tabloid newspapers went there with a mission – to justify what the SAS had done. That was their mission and they were quite clear about it.'

THE RAT PACK AND THE PADDY FACTION

This conception of their 'mission' affected how journalists in Gibraltar related to each other. They tended to group together with other journalists with whom they got on journalistically, socially and politically. Some journalists labelled these groups, for example, the 'rat pack' and the 'hamster pack'; this was a division mainly between British tabloid journalists and some of the Irish and British broadsheet journalists. Some of the broadsheet journalists were also dubbed by the mostly tabloid journalists of the 'rat pack' as the

'Paddy Faction', 'Paddy McGrory fan club' or 'Paddy Factor'. One reason for this was that these journalists would routinely consult Paddy McGrory. The 'Paddy factor' was explained by a tabloid journalist: 'It's a phrase that is used not uncommonly in journalism. It's like you talk about the Irish element in a story. It could only happen because it was in Ireland, or because he is Irish. That is a journalistic interpretation of the "paddy factor".'

The different priorities and values of the different groups of journalists led to some tension between the different groups of journalists. One tabloid journalist commented: 'There was a little bit of friction and hostility to start with. One of the Irish reporters refused to stand for the coroner at the start of the proceedings.'

The journalist concerned told me: 'I remember I was sitting on the back pews and I had a habit of not standing up for the coroner. I remember the tabloid boys threatening me with exposure as the contemptuous republican journalist. I did take it as sheer amusement . . . because there wasn't a single republican journalist there.'

In the course of the inquest a number of stories appeared in British and Irish publications which looked at how the media and in particular the tabloids were reporting the story. One tabloid journalist told me, 'people from the tabloids think that they are there to do their job – they don't want people observing them'. Another told me that some of the tabloid journalists were 'very, very pissed off' about stories which looked at the role of the media. Some journalists thought that the tabloids were 'a bit touchy' about criticism 'considering what they are prepared to dish out'. The divisions between some journalists surfaced when the tabloids felt that a given journalist was not sufficiently 'onside' in his or her reporting. In one example, a British journalist was discussed: 'They decided amongst themselves that he must be gay because he was quiet spoken and they thought he was a bit dubious because he hung around with the Irish journalists.' Another journalist revealed that this same journalist 'was discussed in a very nasty way as though he was a secret Provo'.

'WE SHOT 'EM AND WE SHOT 'EM'

The relations between journalists were not improved by the after-hours activities of some reporters. Ian Jack has related how,

Lying half asleep in my hotel room at the Holiday Inn one night I listened to a song I hadn't heard in twenty years.

Hello, hello, we are the Billy Boys!
 Hello, hello, we *are* the Billy Boys!
 We're up to our knees in Fenian blood,
 Surrender or you'll die,
 For we are the Brighton Billy Boys.

I went to the window. Members of the British popular press were walking unsteadily towards the hotel (*Granta*, no. 25, p. 15).

Some of the journalists in Gibraltar were quite keen on songs. Interestingly, they wrote their own song about the SAS which was distributed to a number of British and Irish journalists. Renditions could be heard late into the night in different parts of Gibraltar. Called 'Song, Don't Spike', it is sung to the tune of 'Don't Dilly Dally on the Way'. Here is the last verse.

Six months later we're filling the papers,
 As we come to Gibraltar to tell our tale.
 Paddy McGrory didn't swallow our story,
 Nor did Felix or the bleedin' jury.
 So we shot 'em, we shot 'em,
 We shot 'em and we shot 'em,
 We shot 'em so the world would always see,
 That you can't jail an SAS man when he's Maggie's assassin
 On a shoot-to-kill policy.

As the *Journalist* (June 1989) was later to reveal, 'the hacks sent the words through an MoD contact to the SAS regimental HQ in Hereford. Our boys behind the screens liked it so much they sent SAS ties in return'.

Practically all the journalists I spoke to found Gibraltar a very boring place with little to do after work other than eat and drink. Media people would go out in groups to the colony's restaurants and bars. Ian Jack reports that

You might be sitting innocently in a bar or walking down the street when the challenge came from behind, 'Stop, police; hands up!' and you'd turn sharply . . . and receive a small jet of water straight in the chest. This was the English journalists' reconstruction of the role of the Special Air Services Regiment as executioners of the members of the Irish Republican Army. (*Granta*, no. 25, p. 15).

'STANDARD PROCEDURE'⁹

Some of the media organisations had more than one journalist in Gibraltar for at least some of the inquest. For example the Press Association had up to three people there at any one time. In contrast the *Star* had one journalist there for only the first ten days. Other papers, for example the *Guardian*, had two journalists there and this meant they could divide the day in court between them.

But by the time the SAS witnesses had finished many tabloid journalists saw little point in being in court because it was unlikely that there would be a 'good story'. One tabloid journalist commented: 'If it was routine and repetitive evidence, we saw no point in the whole pack being in there. So there was in fact a rota system [involving] the pop papers.' This would involve a few journalists dividing the day up between them and then sharing the copy at night. When there was a 'good' witness testifying, such as Carmen Proetta, all the papers would be there. One broadsheet journalist explained why the tabloids are so collaborative:

All the tabloids stick together – they're inseparable. Because they want to cover themselves. Because they don't want competitors to get something they haven't got, whether it be a quote or a particular line which has come out during the day which one thinks is more important than others. And they all want to make sure that they are saying the same things and getting the same quotes. Also, some of them are friends; they hang out here as well as when they go on an assignment out of London.

One tabloid journalist related how this happened on one particular day:

I remember one [witness] said that the SAS man 'pushed past me, I didn't know who he was and he said excuse me as he pushed past, and I noticed the gun in his back pocket. Then he pulled it out and shot the fellow dead.' Everything he said was the same as what everybody else had said, but we said 'the polite SAS man' . . . On a thin day you'd come and say, 'God that was a bit thin; what are we going to write?' Then someone might say, 'I like the story about the bloke who said excuse me as he pushed past' . . . You might sort of laugh amongst yourselves as to what is going to interest the reader the next day.

The fear of competitors getting scoops or the 'angle' of the day is one reason why tabloid journalists stick together in the 'rat pack'.

This collaboration ensured that the tabloid journalists in Gibraltar all wrote similar copy. It did not ensure that this copy went straight in the paper. But the tendency for tabloid papers in direct competition to follow the 'line' of the day was illustrated after the Crown pathologist gave evidence that Savage had been shot in a 'frenzy'. The *Sun* cleared the front page for a 'page one opinion', written back in London, headed 'WHY THE DOGS HAD TO DIE' (12 September 1988). It reported that:

The pathologist at the Gibraltar inquest yesterday described the shootings as 'a frenzied attack'. The *Sun* takes no pleasure in publishing his graphic account of the deaths of three IRA fanatics. *We know many Sun readers will feel revulsion at the way they were shot in cold blood with no chance to surrender.* That is not British justice, they will say. Maybe not – but do not forget we are at war with the IRA.

Down the side of the page they had photos of victims of the IRA with captions such as 'butchered', 'orphan' and 'grieving'. In contrast the *Daily Mirror* in its early editions led on the pathologist's statement: 'FRENZY OF THE SAS – GIB KILLINGS SHOCKED ME, SAYS EXPERT' (9 September 1988). But by its later editions, the 'FRENZY' headline had disappeared to be replaced by 'LEST WE FORGET'. The *Mirror* reported in similar vein to the *Sun*: 'What the inquest jury didn't hear was the catalogue of cold-blooded murder and maiming carried out by the cowards of the IRA in the last year. Cowards like the Gibraltar bombers.' The *Mirror* also had pictures of victims of the IRA in their later editions with captions like 'Murdered' and 'Maimed'.

Curiously, the next day (10 September 1988) under the heading 'PRAISE FOR *Mirror*', the paper reported 'switchboards at the *Mirror* were jammed yesterday by readers calling in to back our page one on the Gibraltar inquest... One caller said, "You are the only newspaper this morning speaking for the majority of the people of Britain."'

'MY JOB IS TO COVER, THEIR JOB IS TO DECIDE':¹⁰ THE EDITORIAL PROCESS

A further filter in the production of news is the editorial process. One tabloid journalist commented that copy 'would almost inevitably be

cut down to a certain degree . . . You have to accept that the subs are paid to do that, paid to put your copy into shape, the shape they want.'

According to one broadsheet journalist, 'Copy never goes straight in the paper; it's always subbed. It always goes through a news desk and three layers of subbing and headlines and the editor.'

One journalist argued that the editorial system can leave broadsheet papers 'vulnerable to tabloid journalism'. In a controversial story, like the testimony of Kenneth Asquez, the paper will have all the copy from the news agencies (in the case of Gibraltar primarily from the Press Association). It may be difficult for journalists who have a different approach to convince their editors that the wire copy isn't the whole story. One journalist argued that because newspapers get all the Press Association copy and because

the tabloids are the major market for the Press Association, so they'll [PA] go for that sort of stuff. It took some time to convince them [subeditors] that Asquez was the story – not because of 'Death on the Rock', but because a most important witness had mysteriously retracted his evidence which he'd written in his own hand. I actually ended up rewriting my intro about three times and I got more and more into saying that the issue was what Asquez had said and not 'Death on the Rock'. It got a bit rewritten by the subs who weren't as convinced as I was that Asquez's retraction was mysterious.

Most of the papers and TV news programmes accepted at face value that Asquez's original account was false.¹¹ 'The headlines tonight. A witness at the Gibraltar inquest, Kenneth Asquez, has admitted he was lying' (BBC1, 18.00, 24 September 1988).

Of the British national press, only the *Guardian*, *Independent*, and *Telegraph* reported any qualification to this account. It took almost two months and new revelations before that image started to crack. But as Roger Bolton has said: 'A close reading of the court transcript makes it clear that by the end of his two sessions in the Gibraltar witness box, the coroner was not sure if what Mr Asquez now said in court was the truth' (*Late Show*, BBC2, 25 January 1989).

In an article titled 'why don't the poodles of the press ask the main Gibraltar question?' (*Spectator*, 1 October 1988), Auberon Waugh has argued that Asquez

claimed that the lie was told in response to pressure from Thames Television. It is normal practice when a witness admits to having

lied, to ask what reason there is to believe his revised version – whether he might not now be giving false evidence in response to pressure from another source. At very least, his evidence tends to be taken with a pinch of salt. But not, it would appear, by the poodles.

CARMEN AND THE RAT PACK

All the elements which went into the construction of news stories about Gibraltar are exemplified in the coverage of the eyewitness Carmen Proetta: anonymous tip-offs, official briefings, misinformation, journalistic preconceptions, the threat of legal action, the demands of editors for a ‘good’ story or simply to fill up space. Proetta had said on ‘Death on the Rock’ that Farrell and McCann had their hands up in seeming surrender when they were shot. She said she had heard no warning and that she had seen Farrell and McCann ‘finished off’ on the ground.

The day after ‘Death on the Rock’ was broadcast the campaign against Carmen Proetta began. The *Evening Standard* started the ball rolling, reporting that ‘Gibraltar’s Chief Inspector Glen Viagas said today: “Mrs Proetta’s husband Maxi is well known to us. He has served two terms in Spanish prisons for smuggling drugs”. The family’s sympathies are said to lie firmly with the Spanish claims to Gibraltar’ (29 April 1988).

By the next day the other papers had more details. The headlines included: ‘SHAMED! DRUG AND SEX SECRETS OF WIFE IN SAS TELLY STORM’ (*Daily Mirror*), ‘TRIAL BY TV CARMEN IS ESCORT GIRL BOSS’ (*Daily Express*), and the infamous headline from the *Sun*, ‘THE TART OF GIB’ (30 April 1988).

The *Sun* alleged that Proetta ‘used to be a prostitute’. The *Daily Mail* claimed that she was ‘a director of a Spanish escort agency’.¹² The *Daily Mirror* alleged of the supposed escort agency that ‘police say it is just a cover for vice’. The *Sun* claimed that ‘police say both Carmen and her husband, 47, have criminal records on Gibraltar’. The *Star* went so far as to claim that Carmen Proetta ‘campaigns for Spanish rule in Gibraltar’.¹³ The *Daily Telegraph* alleged that ‘several residents of the colony, who would not be named, had claimed she was one of only 44 Gibraltarians to vote to end British Rule in the 1967 referendum’.¹⁴

All these allegations were untrue. Carmen Proetta issued writs

against seven national newspapers. Six of these cases have so far ended with apologies and substantial damages to Carmen Proetta.¹⁵ The first to settle was the *Sun* (17 December 1988), which 'agreed to pay damages to Mrs Carmen Proetta and apologised to her for . . . highly defamatory and unfounded allegations . . . It accepted that Mrs Proetta had given an honest account of what she remembers seeing and that she neither hated the British nor was she guilty or involved in the other misconduct described.'

The smear campaign was a strange concoction of lies, misinformation, innuendo, gossip and speculation. It has since been discredited. But where did it come from in the first place?

There appear to have been a number of elements to this smear. Firstly, according to Heather Mills who covered the Gibraltar story for the *Independent*, it started with a 'phone call from a named person in Gibraltar suggesting that they telephone a policeman in Gibraltar who would give them the run-down on Carmen Proetta's character. This they did and there was a policeman there who filled in a lot of information which eventually ended up as we all saw in the tabloids the next day' (BBC2, *Newsnight*, 25 January 1989).

Michael Fielder, the journalist who wrote the story in the *Sun*, told the Dublin-based magazine *Magill* that "'dozens of people including a senior police officer" told him Carmen Proetta was a prostitute' (June 1988). By this time the Gibraltar police were denying that they had briefed the press. *Magill* reported that the "'senior police officer" quoted in the *Sun* article, Chief Inspector Glen Viagas, has told *Magill* that he was misquoted in the article'. Viagas also denied making the allegations about the Proettas' alleged criminal records in Gibraltar.

According to Michael Cockerell the story was reinforced at the top of political life when one 'government minister rang the political correspondents of three different newspapers with defamatory allegations against . . . Proetta' (1989, p. 341).

A second element of the smear, according to the *Observer* (8 May 1988), came from a freelance journalist called Nigel Bowden who supplied Fleet Street with the story about Eve International, the supposed escort agency. 'Bowden told this to a man from the *Daily Mail*, who said, "Nigel, boy, you're sitting on dynamite." Bowden hurried off to fax copies of his information to every paper in Fleet Street.'

Bowden was astonished, however, 'by the gravity of the extra

information added by the *Sun* (*Observer*, 8 May 1988). The *Observer* explained the substance of Bowden's claim; Proetta 'used her qualification as a Spanish resident to help two non-Spaniards set up a firm called Eve International, whose purpose is stated on company documents to be "providing escorts and tourist promotion services". She renounced her shares and involvement in a legal document dated 14 March 1985.'

On the same day as the stories attempting to discredit Carmen Proetta appeared, other official sources in London were at work briefing the press on their preferred version of events. The *Daily Telegraph* (30 April 1988) reported 'Army sources yesterday cast doubt' on 'Death on the Rock':

The sources point out that the SAS is trained to enter an operation with all possible surprise. Gibraltar police vehicles may have used their sirens after the shooting. The car carrying the SAS team would certainly not have done so beforehand. Army sources suggest that Miss Proetta may have mentally transposed the sound of the sirens from the end to the beginning of the incident.¹⁶

The next day *The Sunday Times* (1 May 1988) repeated this account: 'A senior defence source has confirmed that evidence to be submitted to the inquest next month will prove the siren "quite definitely sounded after shots were fired".'¹⁷ But no such evidence was produced. It was generally agreed at the inquest that the police siren had sounded before the shooting. Indeed the summary of the SAS evidence which was leaked to ITN at the start of the inquest specifically states: 'The siren alerted Farrell, McCann and Savage. It seems at that point, one team was about to arrest Farrell and McCann.'

During the summer there were attempts in the press to suggest that Carmen Proetta would not go to the inquest. For example, on 29 May the *Mail on Sunday*, quoting 'government sources', reported that Carmen Proetta would refuse to give evidence at the inquest. On this, Proetta commented that the report 'looked like another attempt to smear her by implying that she was hesitant about her evidence' (*Independent*, 30 May 1988). She would, she said, be at the inquest. As the inquest approached there were more reports along these lines. For example: 'It is still not clear whether Mrs Carmen Proetta will be among the witnesses' (*Sunday Telegraph*, 4 September 1988).

'MORE OF THE SAME': CARMEN PROETTA AT THE INQUEST

Most of the stories about Carmen Proetta had originated in May. By the inquest one journalist argued, 'I think they [the press] had to be slightly careful in the light of libel writs served on them in the case of Proetta.' Nevertheless there were many 'Proetta-hunting' expeditions in which certain journalists 'constantly pestered her at her home in Spain' as they tried to find some substance to back up their earlier libels (*Sunday Tribune*, 25 September 1988). One journalist related how 'I remarked to a journalist from one of the London papers that Carmen Proetta had had a rough time from the press before she came. He said "not half as rough as she's going to get".'

Magill (October 1988) revealed that: 'In Gibraltar this month some of Her Majesty's Press could be heard boasting that Mrs Proetta would be "in for more of the same".'

According to *Magill* one journalist 'booked into a hotel in Spain from where he proceeded to phone call girls on the half-hour. When each arrived up to his room they were paid for their time and shown photographs of Carmen Proetta and asked if they knew her or whether they had ever known her to work as a prostitute... The reporter, however, met with no success in his endeavours' (October 1988).

Another journalist recounted that there had been great excitement when one photographer on a 'Proetta-hunting' expedition got a picture of Carmen Proetta on a beach in Spain. 'They staked out her house [and got a] picture of her on a beach in Spain somewhere... That caused immense excitement with the *Sun*, the *Mirror* and the *Star* because they obviously got lots of call backs saying "why haven't you filed this photograph of Mrs Proetta?".'

The tabloids had a further bit of excitement, or what the *Sunday Tribune* (25 September 1988) called 'a nasty scrimmage with a photographer from the *Sun*', when Carmen Proetta didn't appear in court on Thursday 22 September. The *Sun* had 'Carmen Snubs Gib Court and Goes Out Shopping', while the *Mirror* claimed 'Accuser Carmen Skips SAS Inquest'.¹⁸ *Today* alleged that 'Star witness Carmen Proetta failed to give evidence on the SAS shootings in Gibraltar yesterday. She was out shopping' (23 September 1988). This story was sparked off by a court official, Mr Manalo Correa, who said that 'Mrs Proetta had sent a message to the hearing saying she was working as a translator in Spain. The court had heard she had

been given less than 24 hours notice after being promised 48' (*Glasgow Herald*, 23 September 1988).

'SLIT SKIRT'

The next day Carmen Proetta gave evidence. According to *Magill*,

When she had finished, one of the tabloid journalists who had been writing notes of the cross examination got up from his chair with a look of unconcealed disappointment on his face. There was no 'story'. Carmen Proetta had not been exposed as a Brit-hater or anything else . . . The reporter looked at her as she stepped from the witness box. In bold letters at the bottom of the page of his notebook, he added, in large capitals: 'SLIT SKIRT'. That was all he had to show for his three weeks in Gibraltar (October 1988).

Another journalist related how the story progressed from there.

What appalled me was the discussion afterwards as to what she was wearing – how high was the slit in her skirt. It was a woman reporter actually who I heard dictating copy and saying she was wearing a revealing dress. I challenged this reporter and said, 'do you really think that is a revealing outfit', and she said, 'we want to create an impression of her'. I said, 'you want to create the impression that she's a tart', and the reporter just laughed and said, 'but we can't say that, can we'.

The reliance of some newspapers on PA copy and its potential effect on what gets printed, especially in provincial papers, was illustrated in the copy the next day. The Belfast-based *Irish News*¹⁹, for example, reported that Proetta was 'dressed in a revealing black blouse and skirt' (24 September 1988).

A reporter on a different paper told me: 'I remember the piece I wrote and seeing the piece that was carried in the paper and it was vastly different. The word "revealing" was inserted into the copy.'

Another reporter related that, the day before Carmen Proetta gave evidence: 'A lot of the papers, including the Press Association, ran a line – "Carmen Proetta too busy" to attend inquest . . . Unfortunately that was the story that was run and my own paper ran that story from PA despite the fact that I had run an explanation of why she hadn't come.' The explanation was not carried in this journalist's paper.

The fascination with how Carmen Proetta was dressed surfaced in a

number of papers. The *Daily Mail* reported: 'She was dressed for stardom. The black linen dress, buttoned up the front, exposed to the thigh a flash of elegant leg covered in black stockings. She balanced on black stiletto heels and a wide patent leather belt encircled a small waist' (24 September 1988).

The *Telegraph* described her as 'red haired and strikingly dressed all in black with a slit skirt and silver bangle' (24 September 1988). Most British papers that day used the same photograph, of Carmen Proetta in mid-stride, emphasising the 'split skirt'.²⁰ One broadsheet journalist related that: 'the photographs all concentrated on her legs. [My paper] changed my copy that day. I wrote this very straight piece about what she said and so forth... Someone, I've always meant to find out who did it, changed it... They stuck it beside the picture of her. As far as I was concerned, most papers were repeating the *Sun's* libel against her, in a subtle way.'

Sometimes editors will suggest lines to be followed or even direct on which stories to write. One example at the inquest occurred when a newspaper had a 'good' picture of Carmen Proetta and the journalist who was told to write some copy to accompany it. This was duly done after a trip to Spain.

To be perfectly honest the Carmen one, that was just a photographer who'd gone out the week before and done this picture of her, and they wanted to use it, so I had to put a few words to it. It was as simple as that, really... There was a bit of pressure on us to do a Sunday to Monday story. So [with] Carmen Proetta you'd say 'the controversial witness... standing in the witness box this week'. You'd recount who she was. You'd just make it into a story really.

MISSING WORDS

In addition to actively misrepresenting witnesses, some of the papers simply did not report key pieces of information which were inconsistent with the official story. On the day that Carmen Proetta gave evidence the *Daily Mirror* headlined 'I could have got it wrong, says Carmen' (24 September 1988). *Today* reported that Proetta had 'agreed that the shots she heard while they [Farrell and McCann] were lying on the ground could have been those which killed the third gang member, Sean Savage, at the back of her flat' (24 September 1988).

The Sunday Times added a bit more detail: 'In court she said, "I

didn't notice where the shots came from. I have no idea where they came from. I didn't see any trace of smoke and firing.'" (25 September 1988).

A few days later a Scotland Yard forensic expert, David Prior, gave evidence. According to the *Irish Times*, he said that 'the bullets used by the four soldiers who shot the three IRA members were of the new smokeless propellant variety. He [Prior] agreed with . . . Mr McGrory that on a clear March day it was quite possible for someone to see the shooting but miss both the flash and the smoke' (28 September 1988).

But this fragment of information was not reported in any of the tabloid papers. Indeed it was very hard to find anywhere in the British press, with only the *Daily Telegraph* printing it. Interestingly the *Sunday Times* journalists who wrote the book *Ambush* also fail to mention that the SAS men were using smokeless bullets. They also reported Proetta as 'not so sure' (Adams et al., 1988, p. 182). We might recall that this book was published two months after the end of the inquest. Although Adams, Morgan and Bambridge were never in Gibraltar, *The Sunday Times* had their journalists filing verbatim transcripts of the proceedings back to Wapping.

At the end of the inquest Paddy McGrory summed up the case for the relatives. Jack O'Sullivan has argued that

It is worth noting that only three national newspapers reported Mr McGrory's speech after the coroner bowed to government lawyers' demands that he should request a delay in publication until he had begun the summing-up. The request had no legal force but it was observed by every British newspaper except the *Independent*, the *Guardian* and the *Scotsman* (*Fortnight*, November 1988).

Even when critical perspectives do get an airing they sometimes do not last long. In its early editions on 11 September, *The Sunday Times* ran a story about Gibraltar witness Robin Mordue:

Special Branch officers from Thames Valley police are investigating a spate of mysterious phone calls received by a man who is to be an important witness at the inquest in Gibraltar into the deaths of three IRA terrorists. Robin Mordue, 40, was just feet away from Seán Savage . . . when he was shot by the SAS. Mordue has told police that he believes the phone calls, which began soon after he was asked by officials from the Home Office and Gibraltar to make a statement, may be an attempt to intimidate him, and stop him appearing (11 September 1988).

Curiously this story was dropped from later editions of the paper. According to *Private Eye* (20 January 1989), the journalists involved had to write the story without telling their superiors in case the story was spiked before it got to the paper. It was printed in the first editions, then 'someone noticed and it was promptly taken out before most *Sunday Times* readers had a chance to see it'.²¹

During the cross-examination of DCI Correa, the police officer in charge of the investigation into the killings, it emerged that the Gibraltar police had been unable to find key witnesses to the shootings. That evening ITN reported that: 'The inquest into the killings of the three IRA members in Gibraltar has heard from a police officer that he was unable to find important witnesses to the shootings. Tonight ITN has managed to find them' (ITN, 17.45, 28 September 1988). The report then went on to show ITN's interview with these witnesses filmed the previous May. Yet, by *News at Ten* that night this revelation had, curiously, been dropped.

HEAR NO EVIL, SEE NO EVIL, PRINT NO EVIL

The media coverage of the Gibraltar killings prompted former Unionist MP Enoch Powell to ask, 'where have all the journalists gone?' In an article headed 'The questions our muzzled press should be asking on Gibraltar' he argued that after Gibraltar: 'a massive self-congratulation intoned by the Foreign Secretary engulfed the media: it echoed back and forth in Parliament and the papers. Maybe what happened in Gibraltar was perfectly lawful and defensible . . . Maybe; but there is another possibility. The possibility that it was deliberate, cold blooded, premeditated, murder.'

We might remember that the British media hadn't attempted to investigate the circumstances of the shootings until after 'Death on the Rock'. It wasn't until Alison Cahn, the researcher for the programme, started knocking on doors that any serious attempt was made to find eyewitnesses. The Gibraltar police did not even set up an incident room.

Michael Poole has argued that one of the reasons for the lack of reporting of information which would give a different view is 'the IRA factor. In the current climate, few Fleet Street editors want to be seen doing anything that might remotely be construed as lending support to terrorism, even if it means turning a blind eye to something as potentially damaging as political interference in the

judicial process.' ('No News is Bad News', *The Listener*, 2 February 1989).

The handling of the affair led some journalists to question the government's role. For example Keith Waterhouse, columnist on the *Daily Mail*, has written:

There is mounting concern among people in high places at what they are calling 'trial by government'... Among recent examples... are: the Foreign Secretary's interpretation of the Gibraltar terrorist shootings which the media are expected to accept as gospel... and the condemnation out of hand by the Home Secretary and other government figures of TV films they had not even seen (*Daily Mail*, 9 May 1988).

This, however, has been a minority view. It is clear what kind of reporting Paul Johnson and others had in mind when they condemned 'Death on the Rock'. Johnson, writing in the *Daily Mail* (30 April 1988), complained that investigative journalism was 'the fearless exposé of wrong doing, especially by those in authority, whatever the consequences to society'. The crux of his concern was that this type of reporting might hurt 'British interests'. This notion, that reporting should be measured in terms of 'interests' rather than accuracy is precisely the criterion that Norman Tebbit used to criticise the BBC over its coverage of the bombing of Libya. He complained that showing footage of dead Libyan children would operate 'in Libya's interests'. Such critics are concerned with which 'interests' are served regardless of what may actually have happened.

We might ask which interests certain newspapers have at heart when they print official misinformation, make up their own distortions and leave out inconvenient details. Lord Thomson of Monifieth, chair of the IBA at the time 'Death on the Rock' was broadcast has commented on the campaign against it that 'a number of the newspapers that conducted that campaign were extremely self-interested, because they are also bidding to get into the television business' (*Scotsman*, 4 January 1989).

The connections between the attacks on 'Death on the Rock' and Thames TV and the impending sale of broadcasting franchises have not been lost on the government. As Phillip Whitehead has written, 'Death on the Rock' 'was enough to lose the IBA its remaining friends in government' (*New Statesman and Society*, 26 August 1988).

The government has used the programme as a stick to beat public service broadcasting in general and investigative reporting in particular.

But whatever the outcome of the debate on the future of broadcasting, journalists will continue to be in the front line of the struggle over representations of the conflict in Ireland. If we are to widen the parameters of debate, journalists must go beyond their dependence on 'official' sources and ask the awkward questions about incidents like Gibraltar. They must then publish the answers. But even if they do, we might remember the words of Colin Wallace, a former Captain in the British army who worked in 'psychological operations' in Ireland in the 1970s. He has described the potential of misinformation to influence public opinion: 'The important thing is to get saturation coverage for your story as soon after the controversial event as possible. Once the papers have printed it the damage is done. Even when the facts come out, the original image is the one that sticks' (quoted in *What the Papers Say*, Channel Four, 11 March 1988).

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Notes

1. In the course of this research I interviewed almost 40 journalists, over 30 of whom had been in Gibraltar for at least part of the inquest. Depending on which figure you believe, this constitutes between one third and one half of the number of journalists at the inquest. Most of the journalists I spoke to preferred to remain anonymous. I decided therefore not to name any of them. In this chapter the terms 'broadsheet' and 'tabloid' refer simply to the format of the paper. Additionally, because a large number of the journalists covering the story came from Ireland, the phrase 'broadsheet journalist' refers to journalists based in or working for Dublin, Belfast, Glasgow and Edinburgh, as well as for London papers or broadcast outlets. During the research I obtained a number of official and unofficial documents

dealing with various aspects of the incident. These documents, which include the soldiers' version of the shootings leaked to ITN and the *Guardian*, were obtained from reliable sources and are referenced whenever they are used.

2. *Star*, 7 March 1988.
3. All details about MoD statements come from the *Daily Telegraph*, 8 March 1988.
4. Glenholmes surfaced again in the *Sunday Express* of 6 September 1988 in a supposed plot to kill Mrs Thatcher.
5. Foreign Office Press Officer, Chris Osborne.
6. Spanish policeman, quoted in the *Independent*, 8 March 1988.
7. We might note in passing that this statement which was used by ITN and the *Guardian* was unsigned. There have been no calls for an inquiry into its use as there were when 'Death on the Rock' used an unsigned statement from Kenneth Asquez.
8. To be fair, Channel 4 News did put it into context as just one view of what had happened.
9. Tabloid journalist.
10. Tabloid journalist.
11. See for example, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *Financial Times*, *The Times*, *Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Star*, *Today*, ITN 17.45, BBC1 18.00 all 24 September 1988 and *The Sunday Times*, *Sunday Telegraph*, *Scotland on Sunday*, 25 September 1988.
12. The *Daily Express*, *Daily Record*, *Sun*, *Star*, *Daily Mirror* and *The Sunday Times* also carried these allegations.
13. The *Daily Express*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail* and the *Sun* also alleged that she and her husband were 'anti-British'.
14. This was repeated by the *Sun*, *Today* (30 April 1988) and the *Sunday Telegraph* (1 May 1988).
15. The papers were the *Sun*, *Star*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail*, *Mail on Sunday* and *Daily Mirror*. The case against *The Sunday Times* has, at the time of writing, still to come to court.
16. We might note in passing that the reporter writes 'the car carrying the SAS team'. This version of how the SAS arrived at the scene stands in marked contrast to the official story at the inquest. A central plank of this was that the SAS men arrived at the scene on foot and not in a police car as the Proettas had alleged.
17. Compare these statements from 'official sources' with the evidence of Brig. Sam Cowan, the Director of Public Relations at MoD, to Lord Windelsham's inquiry into 'Death on the Rock'. He said that the reason they had originally refused to brief Julian Manyon, the reporter on 'Death on the Rock', in April 1988 was because they were 'absolutely sticking rigidly to the line that the Foreign Secretary's statement in the House is now what we've got to abide with until the inquest' (Transcript of MoD Oral Evidence to Windelsham). It is clear that they felt no such constraints after 'Death on the Rock' was screened.
18. Carmen Proetta also issued writs against the *Sun* and *Mirror* for this coverage. As we have already noted, they have both apologised and paid damages.

19. The *Irish News*, perhaps surprisingly for a paper which sells many copies in West Belfast, had no reporter in Gibraltar and so relied on Press Association copy.
20. See for example *The Times*, *Daily Record*, *Daily Express*, *Independent*, *Guardian*, *Daily Mirror*, *Sun*, *Star*, the *Scotsman* and *Daily Telegraph*. This picture was not in the *Daily Mail* or *Today* – they had other pictures from earlier ‘Proetta hunts’.
21. This story later appeared in the *Irish Times* (12 September 1988) and the *Guardian* (6 October 1988).

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