

Britain's Defence and Security Media Advisory: D-Notices, State Censorship and the Cynical Collusion of Mainstream Media

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If you've been following the Skripal/Novichok/Chemical weapons/Syria drama unfold through TruePublica you'll be up to date on most, if not all, the relevant information there is to know.

On several occasions, we have published news relating to the D-Notices sent out by the state to censor the mainstream media in both print and broadcast to ensure that their version of the story, one filled full of holes, didn't go, well, mainstream.

One question raised a few times by our readers was, who is it actually decides when to issue a D-Notice and who sits on its committee.

Here is the explainer and an interesting one it is too.

A DSMA-Notice (**Defence and Security Media Advisory Notice**) — formerly a DA-Notice (Defence Advisory Notice), and before that called a Defence Notice (D-Notice) until 1993—is an official request to news editors not to publish or broadcast items on specified subjects for “reasons of national security.”

In the UK the original D-Notice system was introduced in 1912 and run as a voluntary system by a joint committee headed by an Assistant Secretary of the War Office and a representative of the Press Association. Any D-Notices or DA-notices were only advisory requests, and so are not legally enforceable; hence, news editors can choose not to abide by them. However, they are today slavishly complied with by the media.

In 1971, all existing D-Notices were cancelled and replaced by standing D-Notices, which gave general guidance on what might be published and what was discouraged; and what would require further advice from the secretary of the Defence, Press and Broadcasting Advisory Committee (DPBAC). In 1993, the notices were renamed DA-Notices (Defence Advisory Notices).

One of the recommendations resulting from the 2015 review of the DA-notice system, included the renaming of the system to the Defence and Security Media Advisory (DSMA) Committee. In 2017, the notices were reworded and then reorganized into the following categories:

- DSMA-Notice 01: Military Operations, Plans & Capabilities
- DSMA-Notice 02: Nuclear and Non-Nuclear Weapon Systems and Equipment
- DSMA-Notice 03: Military Counter-Terrorist Forces, Special Forces and

Intelligence Agency Operations, Activities and Communication Methods and Techniques

- DSMA-Notice 04: Physical Property and Assets
- DSMA-Notice 05: Personnel and their Families who work in Sensitive Positions

From here, it gets interesting because in 2015 the 'committee' from all accounts seemed to change shape, which beforehand had been made up of state officials, and some elements of the press, particularly in times of real national security such as the world wars. Nowadays it is made up of a few state officials and mostly - the mainstream media.

There are 15 senior media people who sit on this censorship committee. As well as the BBC, ITV, ITN and Murdoch's *Sky News*, representing broadcasters, there are a variety of representatives from the broadsheet and tabloid press, regional and Scottish newspapers and magazines and publishing - including two News UK and Harper Collins, (both owned by Murdoch) as well as Trinity Mirror, the *Daily Mail* and the *Guardian*.

On the government side of the committee are the chair from the MoD and four intelligence connected representatives from the MoD (Director General Security Policy), Foreign Office (Director for National Security), Home Office (unspecified post) and Cabinet Office (Deputy National Security Adviser for Security, Intelligence, and Resilience).

The DSMA committee itself obviously likes to project the view that it is a rather dull and uninteresting meeting of minds and that there's nothing going on to report. But these meetings are to discuss and agree what can and cannot be printed or broadcast in the mainstream media. Then, instead of going back to their respective places of work and simply passing on the message - the state then issues notices to the same people who just agreed not to print the scandals the government just asked them not to print in the first place.

[SpinWatch](#) makes an interesting point by highlighting exactly how much the mainstream media collude directly with government on controlling the output.

“as a [former vice chair of the committee \(a journalist\)](#) put it, ‘is emphatically not censorship... but voluntary, responsible media restraint’. Then [working at Sky News](#), that vice chair, Simon Bucks, is now CEO at the [Services Sound and Vision Corporation](#), the broadcasting service which says it is ‘championing the Armed Forces’. Bucks also wrote that the DSMA committee is ‘the most mythologised and misunderstood institution in British media... “Slapping a D-notice” on something the establishment wanted suppressed has been the stuff of thrillers, spy stories and conspiracy theories for more than a century”.

The reader should have gathered from that statement alone, that indeed, slapping a D-Notice on the media is not the stuff of conspiracy theories otherwise they wouldn't be doing it in the first place. The conspiracy is that that the mainstream media stand accused of colluding in important cover-ups with and for the state. That is not a theory - that is a fact.

The Labour party is currently attacking freedom of speech and the free press, if there was indeed one to speak of, with a Bill tabled by deputy Labour leader **Tom Watson** (known as Labour's 'bully boy') this week. This Bill was described by the Financial Times thus:

“it would force our hand and chill freedom of expression in this country. Investigative journalism – such as the FT’s expose of The Presidents Club this year – could well become too risky given the potential costs.” It would be handing rich individuals a licence to harass the press, free of charge.”

Thankfully this draconian measure failed.

No doubt being caught up in the [expenses scandal](#) that the Telegraph printed didn’t exactly help with Mr Watson’s general view that Britain should benefit from a free press. His proposal came a couple of days after the World Press Freedom report showing Britain is now languishing nicely in 40th place in a group of other countries who also despise free speech – by those who try to hold power to account.

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