

FOI Reference: 0458-15 – Digest of Information to be released

Email From: John Freeman (Sensitive)

Sent: 03 October 2014 10:31

To: [REDACTED]

Cc: Kate Smith (Sensitive); Archie Young (Sensitive); Newsdesk (Sensitive); Colin Roberts (Sensitive); Fiona Clouder (Sensitive);

Subject: Re: British Embassy Buenos Aires: Top Gear [REDACTED]

CLASSIFICATION: [REDACTED]

All

It is only 06:00 in Buenos Aires as I write and I should like to take stock with Embassy colleagues at the start of the working day here.

That said I would like now to say thanks to all involved overnight on this issue: at Post on the Consular side, [REDACTED] our [REDACTED], and in London the GRC responders.

Secondly, press lines, on which I have seen the emails from [REDACTED]. I think [REDACTED] is right to point out the limits of our contacts with the BBC before yesterday evening; that has been part of the difficulty, ie a lack of information from the BBC team as to when they intended to come here and what their itinerary or purpose/objectives were/are. [REDACTED]

I or someone else in my team will revert once we have had a chance to discuss and in light of media reporting here (which [REDACTED] was monitoring until late last night).

I am also copying in Fiona Clouder as I assume the Top Gear people will have crossed into Chile by now. And also Colin Roberts in Stanley for information.

John

Email From: John Freeman (Sensitive)

Sent: Friday, October 03, 2014 12:57 AM

To: [REDACTED]

Cc: Kate Smith (Sensitive); Archie Young (Sensitive); PS Minister Swire - Info (Sensitive); Newsdesk (Sensitive);

Subject: Re: British Embassy Buenos Aires: Top Gear [REDACTED]

CLASSIFICATION:[REDACTED]

I hope also that Press office can contact the BBC tomorrow morning on lines suggested by [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] earlier email below.

John

HMA, Buenos Aires

Email From: John Freeman (Sensitive)

Sent: 03 October 2014 19:26

To: [REDACTED]

Cc: Archie Young (Sensitive); Kate Smith (Sensitive);

Subject: FW: VTC with BA: Top Gear [REDACTED]- UK Media [REDACTED]

I have incorporated my changes/adjustments below.

John

Email From: John Freeman (Sensitive)
Sent: 06 October 2014 18:51
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Argentina: Travel Advice [REDACTED]

CLASSIFICATION:[REDACTED]

My one cautionary thought at this stage, is that if the Advice is till serviceable we should keep it as it is.

John

Email From: John Freeman (Sensitive)
Sent: 05 October 2014 11:23
To: Fiona Clouder (Sensitive); Global Response Centre (Sensitive);
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Media follow up - Top Gear Argentina / British Embassy Buenos Aires [REDACTED]

CLASSIFICATION:[REDACTED]

Are you able to copy and send the Clarkson in S Times article, pl. It is not accessible online to us.

John

Email From: John Freeman (Sensitive)
Sent: 07 October 2014 17:09
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: Archie Young (Sensitive); * (Sensitive); Kate Smith (Sensitive);
Subject: RE: ARGENTINA: TOP GEAR EPISODE: REFLECTIONS, PROSPECTS and RISKS [REDACTED]

I very much agree with [REDACTED] assessment below. [REDACTED]

John

Email From: John Freeman (Sensitive)
Sent: 06 October 2014 16:54
To: Archie Young (Sensitive)
Cc: Kate Smith (Sensitive); Sarah MacIntosh (Sensitive); DL BAires - Foreign Policy Team (Sensitive); [REDACTED]
Subject: ARGENTINA: TOP GEAR EPISODE: REFLECTIONS, PROSPECTS and RISKS [REDACTED]

Archie

I think it may be helpful if as well as providing an update, I set out some reflections on the Top Gear episode in the province of Tierra del Fuego. There is also one point concerning the BBC's intention to seek recovery of the cars the Top Gear team abandoned here last Friday, on which I would welcome agreement (or advice if not in agreement) to our proposed way forward.

Background

Some background first. A representative of the Top Gear programme ([REDACTED]) contacted the Embassy in early August. Despite a number of follow-up phone messages and emails from [REDACTED] never came back to us. We therefore had no knowledge of the BBC programme's plans for Argentina until we saw local media reports about the team's presence in Bariloche late last month. Thereafter there was no further reporting until the incidents in Tierra del Fuego played out last week. Following an approach to the GRC out of hours, this Embassy became engaged at the level of DHM and Consular officer. Such contacts continued until the team exited Argentina, one group doing so by road into Chile and another, smaller group (including the presenters) which had flown back earlier to BsAs, left for London on Friday on the regular British Airways flight.

Local Media Reporting

Since the Top Gear teams left Argentina on Friday there has been extensive and uniformly critical local media reporting. These have picked up on Jeremy Clarkson's tweets and newspaper interviews/Sunday Times article. They have almost all expressed incredulity at the assertion that the numberplate most at issue (ie the FLK one, though all three numberplates on the presenters' cars have raised queries) is just a coincidence. As well as covering the events in Tierra del Fuego, local media (as reported in our daily news service) have also noted the expressed intention of parliamentarians from Tierra del Fuego to present a bill in the Congress to "repudiate the provocation" by Top Gear.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

BBC Wish to Recover the Cars they Abandoned last Friday Morning

In terms of the BBC, we were approached by an [REDACTED] on Top Gear ([REDACTED], who never came back to us when we had offered our assistance earlier in the year) over the week-end, ie via the GRC, seeking advice on how the three Top Gear vehicles abandoned near the border with Chile might best be recovered ([REDACTED]).

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

John

Email From: John Freeman (Sensitive)
Sent: 10 October 2014 22:07
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Argentina Travel Advice review meeting [REDACTED]

My thanks to you and the other colleagues involved. I agree and accept your recommendations.

John

Email From: John Freeman (Sensitive)
Sent: 21 October 2014 14:00
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Top Gear number plate row: Argentinian ambassador seeks apology | Media | The Guardian

Tba

<http://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/oct/21/top-gear-number-plate-row-argentina-jeremy-clarkson>

Sent from my iPad

Email From: John Freeman (Sensitive)
Sent: 29 December 2014 00:09
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: Fiona Clouder (Sensitive); Colin Roberts (Sensitive); Kate Smith (Sensitive); [REDACTED]
Subject: Argentina: Top Gear and other media stories [REDACTED]

CLASSIFICATION:[REDACTED]

Infobae's website this evening carries three Argentine/Falklands related items: the Top Gear programme (following the appearance of Part Two of the "Special"); [REDACTED]. If you look at the Express website it also quotes from J Clarkson in his Sun column speaking of Amb Castro (she "can go foey").

[REDACTED]

I am copying in Kate Smith, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

John

Email From: John Freeman (Sensitive)
Sent: 03 October 2014 13:11
To: [REDACTED]; Global Response Centre (Sensitive)
Cc: British Embassy Buenos Aires; FCO; Kate Smith (Sensitive); Archie Young (Sensitive); PS Minister Swire - Info (Sensitive); Newsdesk (Sensitive); SOSFA Action (Sensitive); DL OOH Buenos Aires; DL OOH Santiago;

Subject: Re: Top Gear Argentina / Chile

You will also have seen the report (in our news service this morning) that the BA Herald is reporting that there is a disturbing degree of coincidence between the numbers on two other BBC numberplates and UK and Argentine war dead numbers. [REDACTED]. The BBC should be ready for queries re that also [REDACTED].

John.

Email From: John Freeman (Sensitive)
Sent: Friday, October 03, 2014 12:36 PM
To: [REDACTED]; Global Response Centre (Sensitive)
Cc: British Embassy Buenos Aires; FCO; Kate Smith (Sensitive); Archie Young (Sensitive); PS Minister Swire - Info (Sensitive); Newsdesk (Sensitive); SOSFA Action (Sensitive); DL OOH Buenos Aires; DL OOH Santiago;
Subject: Re: Top Gear Argentina / Chile

[REDACTED]

John

Email From: John Freeman (Sensitive)
Sent: 03 October 2014 12:34
To: Archie Young (Sensitive); [REDACTED]; Global Response Centre (Sensitive); [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]; Kate Smith (Sensitive); Newsdesk (Sensitive); Fiona Clouder (Sensitive); Colin Roberts (Sensitive)
Subject: Re: British Embassy Buenos Aires: Top Gear [REDACTED]

CLASSIFICATION:[REDACTED]

Archie

Thanks. We of course will be ready to join in a VTC later as and when you wish.

I have just had a word with [REDACTED] and at my request [REDACTED] will now ring his BBC team contact (the person [REDACTED] was in contact with yesterday evening) and as well as inquiring how things are (hopefully they should be crossing the border now) will give them [REDACTED] tel contact number in Santiago (and alert [REDACTED] to that). [REDACTED] will also touch base with [REDACTED] (our [REDACTED]) in case [REDACTED] has any news/background.

I understood yesterday evening that though the bulk of the TGear team should be crossing over the border, some of them are coming up to BsAs preliminary to flying out. We will be in touch with them today if we can reach them.

John

Email From: John Freeman (Sensitive)
Sent: 09 October 2014 18:03
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: Kate Smith (Sensitive); Archie Young (Sensitive); FCO; (PS Minister Swire - Info (Sensitive)
Subject: Re: Argentina / Top Gear [REDACTED]

CLASSIFICATION:[REDACTED]

Thank you for taking the call and handling it so well. I agree with all your core points, viz: the limited extent to which we can (properly) assist the BBC (ie not much more than we have done already); the need for them to consult an Argentine lawyer; and the fact that we cannot give any guarantee re the safety of BBC personnel or agents.

I remain unclear as to why the BBC considers it so vital to recover the vehicles (even if in scrap form). [REDACTED].

John

Email From: John Freeman (Sensitive)

Sent: 10 October 2014 19:12

To: [REDACTED]

Cc: Kate Smith (Sensitive); Archie Young (Sensitive); FCO; (Sensitive); PS Minister Swire - Info (Sensitive);

Subject: Argentina: Top Gear: BBC Legal Actions [REDACTED]

Thanks. I agree with your recommendation re the terms of your communication with the BBC.

I would suggest also, however, that you send an email to Consular et al in the FCO seeking clarification by Monday as to the extent of assistance or help, eg re notarisation, we can or should offer upon request to the BBC. My own approach, subject to correction from London, remains to continue to act in accordance with normal Consular practice.

[REDACTED].

John