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Prime Minister

Yes - but things seem to be changing over the weekend can't we discuss reports with Blanche.

I imagine that you would wish to be consulted again before a decision to despatch troops was implemented? This minute comes close to asking for carte

Blanche 6/6

NEW HEBRIDES: SECURITY SITUATION

1. You will be aware of the serious security situation in the New Hebrides Condominium following the insurrection on the island of Santo on 28 May. Peter Carrington has asked me to inform you and other members of the OD Committee about the latest position.

2. Britain and France are jointly responsible for internal security in the territory until independence, due on 30 July. On 2 June I met my French colleague, M Dijoud, in Paris. We agreed to make a further appeal to the protagonists to resume the political talks begun in London in March, and to settle their differences peacefully. Fr Lini, the Chief Minister, has now offered a resumption of talks and certain concessions to the rebel leader (Stephens) on condition that the authority of the Central Government is restored on Santo forthwith. Stephens has shown himself willing to talk, but it seems unlikely that he and his French colon backers will agree to Fr Lini's conditions in full. The Opposition in Parliament are pressing for more decisive action. Pressure is also building up in the UN.

3. Peter Carrington told the Cabinet on 5 June that if negotiations were not resumed shortly he may need to recommend the despatch of British troops to Vila in order to demonstrate that we are prepared to live up to our obligation to safeguard the territorial integrity of the Condominium. Local security forces under the control of the Resident Commissioners are inadequate to restore order on Santo.

cc (80) 22 concs minute 2 (extract)



4. We have considered alternative courses, but reluctantly conclude that, should a negotiated settlement not prove possible, the only way to restore the authority of the legitimate government on Santo is for Britain and France jointly to deploy troops. We are therefore considering with the Ministry of Defence the precautionary despatch from the UK of sufficient forces (a battalion HQ and one Company of Royal Marine Commandos) to Vila to enable us to carry out a joint action with French troops (based nearby in Noumea) should this prove necessary. This would be consistent with the existing Joint Theatre Plan (known to the French), which provides for a joint operation with the French. Our troops would not be sufficient for a unilateral British action to restore order on Santo. Should this be necessary at a later stage they would need to be reinforced. But their presence in Vila would steady the nerve of the government, encourage Stephens to negotiate seriously and discourage a colon-inspired coup in the capital: a possibility which the French take seriously.

5. M Dijoud has expressed his willingness to consider whatever next steps are necessary should our latest initiative come to nothing. I have invited him to London for talks early next week. By then it should be clear whether or not Stephens has shown himself willing to accept the restoration of the central government's authority on Santo. If he has not done so, I would propose to inform M Dijoud that we are ready to activate our contingency plans and send troops to Vila. We should then be in a position to carry out a security action with French forces should this prove necessary.

6. I am copying this minute to members of OD and Sir Robert Armstrong.

P.A.R.B.

6 June 1980



NEW HEBRIDES CONDOMINIUM

ESSENTIAL FACTS

1. Independence is planned for 30 July 1980. We and French now accept this date.
2. Until independence Britain and France remain jointly responsible for internal security. The British and French Resident Commissioners in Vila each have two 30-man platoons of riot trained police mobile units (PMUs) for this purpose. The ordinary police force is controlled by the New Hebrides Government (NHG).
3. Since he lost local elections in November 1979 Stephens, leader of secessionist Na Griamel movement, has been threatening militant action. On 28 May he took over Santo island with aid of 40 French colons (mostly half-castes). Stephens also has support of Right Wing American Phoenix Foundation which aims to create a base for dubious business operations.
4. Reliable reports from Santo difficult to obtain. But clear that Stephens is in complete control on the ground. New Hebrides Government District Commissioner and 8 policemen have been detained, and police station ransacked. Some 2,000 people, including 104 non New Hebrideans (21 Britons) have been evacuated in an exercise organised by British Resident Commissioner.
5. On 30 May NHG formally appealed for help from Britain and France to quell the rebellion. The Minister of State, Mr Blaker, met responsible French Minister M Dijoud in Paris on 2 June (M Dijoud had been unable to agree to an earlier meeting). M Dijoud refused to contemplate the use of force at this stage. He insisted on a further appeal to both sides to renew political talks begun in London in March. It was agreed that we would press the Chief Minister to offer concessions (conditional on the restoration of his authority on Santo). The French would exert pressure on Stephens, who had until recently at least their tacit support.



6. The two Ministers reaffirmed their support for the legitimate government and the Independence Constitution agreed by all parties in Vila last year. They also reaffirmed their determination to safeguard the territorial integrity of the Condominium

7. Mr Blaker made a statement in the House of Commons along these lines on 3 June. The statement was agreed with the French, who rejected our suggestion that we should set a deadline by which negotiations must be re-started.

8. On 3 June we instructed our Resident Commissioner to act accordingly, while coordinating his actions with his French colleague to ensure that he kept his part of the bargain. While we think the Chief Minister will be prepared to make an offer of concessions, it appears highly unlikely that the pre-conditions will be met.

9. On 5 June, the Chief Minister broadcast an appeal for renewed discussions with Stephens. He offered those concessions which we had agreed with the French, on condition that the authority of his government should be restored on Santo. He gave Stephens 24 hours to reply.

10. Stephens has not yet reacted to this message. But in response to an earlier appeal from the Chief Minister, he claims to have released his hostages (although they are still on Santo) and has offered to negotiate, on condition that the talks take place on Santo in the presence of Mr Blaker and M Dijoud.