



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

11 June 1980

Dear Michael,

European Council: New Hebrides

/ I attach a brief on the New Hebrides for use in discussion with the French in the margins at Venice. The Prime Minister may wish to discuss the handling of the subject with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary on the aircraft. Lord Carrington has not yet seen the brief.

/ In addition to the brief itself, I attach copies of the following:

- (a) Lord Carrington's statement today;
- (b) Vila Telegram 384 reporting discussions between the British and French Resident Commissioners about the deployment of forces;
- (c) Paris Telegram 529 reporting M. Dijoud's first message about the deployment of French gendarmes;
- (d) Telegram summarising the last meeting with M. Dijoud in London (on 9 June).
- (e) Draft telegram reporting Sir M Palliser's conversation this evening with the French Ambassador.

Yours ever
Roderic Lyne

(R M J Lyne)
Private Secretary

M O'D B Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street

NEW HEBRIDES: POINTS TO MAKE

1. We wish to maintain the principle of joint action with you in dealing with the current problems in the New Hebrides.
2. We regret that we were not consulted before your decision was taken to despatch gendarmes from Noumea to Vila.
3. There appears to be a misunderstanding between us over what was agreed by our Resident Commissioners in Vila.
4. Our view is that the Resident Commissioners agreed that any forces sent from outside the New Hebrides should be a joint one.
5. They also agreed to recommend that we should both respond to Lini's latest request for French and British military assistance.
6. Although not consulted we accept your deployment of gendarmes to be your response to that recommendation.
7. The despatch of British troops represents our response to that recommendation.
8. The size and composition of the British force is consistent with our contingency plan for a joint operation by both our governments (the French are aware of the force levels in our plan for such an operation).
9. We must clearly avoid letting this misunderstanding become a cause of friction between us.
10. As agreed when M. Dijoud visited London we should instruct our Resident Commissioners to cooperate more closely in the New Hebrides. They should work for a resumption of negotiations taking as a starting point the concessions and preconditions agreed by Mr Blaker and M. Dijoud on 2 June.
11. We believe that the presence of British and French forces in the area should encourage both parties to negotiate seriously. Should the security situation in the New Hebrides improve to our mutual satisfaction we should be prepared to agree to the joint withdrawal of our respective forces.
12. We would hope that Mr Blaker and M. Dijoud would be able to visit the New Hebrides, as agreed on 9 June, to bring negotiations to a satisfactory conclusion.

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. 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 (Fr Lini) 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. Mr Blaker made a statement in the House of Commons along these lines on 3 June.

7. On 3 June we instructed our Resident Commissioner to act with the NHG, while co-ordinating his actions with his French colleague. On 5 June Fr Lini broadcast an appeal to Stephens offering concessions provided that Santo returned to the status quo ante 28 May. He gave Stephens 24 hours in which to reply. Stephens reply did not meet Fr Lini's demands and on 9 June the French Resident Commissioner visited Stephens on Santo. Stephens agreed to meet Fr Lini on neutral ground but he added that he wanted Mr Blaker and M Dijoud to attend. He also demanded that the blockade be lifted. The French Commissioner rejected these demands.

8. On 6 June Mr Blaker invited M Dijoud to London to plan ahead in case Fr Lini's initiative failed. They met on 9 June.

9. Mr Blaker told M Dijoud that we were considering activating our existing contingency plan for pre-deployment of troops in Vila in order to be able to act jointly to restore order. M Dijoud argued that the presence of British troops in Vila, at this stage, would be provocative. French colons would misinterpret their presence, which France would regard as unilateral action in breach of the principles of the Condominium.

10. Mr Blaker and M Dijoud agreed that British troops positioned over the horizon, in Fiji or another nearby friendly country, would indicate our willingness to act jointly with the French gendarmerie already based on New Caledonia. British troops of company size with HQ element would be so deployed.

11. Mr Blaker and M Dijoud also undertook to instruct their Resident Commissioners to work more closely to press the two sides to resume their dialogue. Mr Blaker and M Dijoud would visit the New Hebrides to supervise the final stages of a negotiated solution in late June or early July. The Secretary of State met both Ministers and stressed the need for joint co-operation at all levels to resolve the problem.

LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

12. During the night of 10 June an opposition crowd of 200-300 led by Mr Alexis Yolou, a member of the National Assembly marched on the district HQ on Tanna, apparently see the release of 29 prisoners in the jail. Police used tear gas to disperse the crowd who responded with shotgun and rifle fire. In the confusion Mr Uolou was killed. There are now 2 PMU platoons on Tanna.

* 13. On 11 June M Dijoud asked the Embassy in Paris to inform Mr Blaker that the French Government had decided to send immediately a contingent of gendarmerie from Noumea to Vila in order to "prevent clashes in Vila between supporters of the Vanuaku Pati (Fr Lini) and the Moderes (colon backed) following the death of Alexis Yolou".

14. On 11 June HMG decided to despatch troops to Vila to be seen to be acting jointly with the French and in response to an agreed recommendation by both Resident Commissioners.

15. On 11 June a message was received via the Embassy to the effect that the French President would withdraw French gendarmes if British troops were sent to Vila, which they would regard as unilateral action.

16. The Secretary of State and Mr Blaker announced in Parliament on 11 June that British troops would be deployed to Vila.

* On 11 June both Resident Commissioners agreed to recommend immediately to their Governments the earliest possible despatch of both French & British forces.