



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

18 February 1980

Dear Michael,

Prime Minister

Rhodesia: Withdrawal

You told me that the Prime Minister would like to be informed on our plans for withdrawal from Rhodesia after the elections.

Our intention is that the interval between elections and independence should be as brief as possible. The basic constitutional formalities - appointment of a Prime Minister, election of a senate and of a President elect - should require only about two weeks. The key factor will be the time needed to choose a Prime Minister with wide enough support to form a government and this will in turn depend upon how clear cut the election results are. A period of manoeuvre over the formation of a coalition is likely. We shall probably not be able to set a date for independence until after the appointment of a Prime Minister. It is likely, therefore, that the period will be two or three weeks though in a very unstable situation it would be possible to cut short the constitutional formalities and arrange a speedier withdrawal.

Withdrawal of the Commonwealth Monitoring Force was discussed by Lord Carrington and the Defence Secretary on 15 February. They agreed that any needless risk to the monitors must be avoided, but that the disengagement should be conducted in such a way that the PF forces were not alarmed. Otherwise there would be a risk of precipitating an exodus from the assembly places, which is what we want to avoid. The Governor has already asked Nkomo and Mugabe to instruct their forces to remain in the assembly places after the elections (Nkomo has agreed) and will shortly be explaining to them how we see the process of withdrawal, so that the PF forces can be briefed in good time.

Decisions on the exact timing and rate of withdrawal will have to be taken by the Governor and General Acland in the light of the situation on the ground. But present thinking is that withdrawal would begin on 29 February or 1 March and be phased over the period between the elections and independence. The first stage would be withdrawal of monitors from the PF assembly places. Where it is safe to do so and the PF themselves want it, some monitors may be left at police posts in the vicinity of the assembly places to act as a channel of communication between the PF forces and the Rhodesian police and civil authorities who will take over responsibility for the administration of the assembly places. Where it is clear that the Patriotic Front forces are likely to leave the assembly places immediately after the elections (and this is likely to be the case with some ZANLA) and the

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monitors would in consequence be at risk, they would be withdrawn immediately. Monitors could be left longer at ZIPRA assembly places and with the PF commanders and the Rhodesian JOCs where they can play a useful liaison role. Other elements of the Monitoring Force would continue, until independence, to supervise the training of PF forces with the Rhodesian army, on which it is hoped to make a start this week.

The Governor and his staff are also making a major effort to get the Rhodesian administration to think constructively about the handling of the PF forces. Agreement has been reached on the payment of resettlement grants to those who wish to go back to civilian life; and a salary will be paid from 1 March to those members of the PF forces who remain in the assembly places.

The above assumes relatively stable conditions after the elections. If there is a major breakdown of law and order or some form of coup, it might be necessary to consider a reinforced withdrawal, using forces from the UK (up to three battalions could be made available). Work has been done on this, on a contingency basis, by the Ministry of Defence. It was agreed by Lord Carrington and Mr Pym that knowledge of it would be restricted as closely as possible.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Brian Norbury in the MOD.

yours ever
Roderic Lyne

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Private Secretary

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