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in PM's OD folder

New Hebrides

PM/80/44

THE PRIME MINISTER

New Hebrides: Security Situation

1. In his minute of 6 June Peter Blaker informed you and members of OD of the serious situation in the New Hebrides and that we were considering the precautionary despatch of a company size unit with HQ element to Vila. The deployment of such a unit to the area would demonstrate our commitment to protect the territorial integrity of the Condominium and would put us in a position where we could act jointly with the French should this prove necessary.
2. M Dijoud, the responsible French Minister, came to London for talks with Mr Blaker on 9 June. I also saw him for half an hour. M Dijoud considered that the precautionary deployment of British troops to Vila itself would breach the principles of the Condominium, would be misinterpreted by francophones in the territory and would be counter-productive. He said that France could not accept such a move. We do not accept that a precautionary deployment of troops to Vila would of itself put us in breach of the 1914 Protocol. However it would neither be to the advantage of the emergent New Hebrides, nor in our wider interests, to risk a serious confrontation with the French by deploying troops in the face of opposition from the French Government.
3. M Dijoud agreed that we should be seen to be in a position to act in concert with the French, should the need arise; and that it would therefore be useful for us to have appropriate forces readily available elsewhere in the region. Such a move would demonstrate our resolve to bring the New Hebrides to independence, encourage the parties to resolve their differences and discourage the NHG* from precipitate action.

*New Hebrides Government

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5. It was agreed that this arrangement for the pre-positioning of British troops in the region, as part of a package, should help us to make progress through negotiations. We also agreed that we should instruct our two Resident Commissioners to work more closely in their efforts to persuade the two sides to resume the dialogue interrupted by the secession of Santo on 28 May. A joint statement will be issued later this week in which we and the French will set a timescale within which we expect some real progress to be made. We shall then propose that the two responsible Ministers should go to Vila to bring the negotiations to a conclusion about the end of June or early July.
6. The French will be sending a mission to the New Hebrides this week with a generous economic aid offer (the implementation of which will be conditional on a commitment by the New Hebrides Government to respect the vital interests of French citizens in the New Hebrides).
7. Our preferred place for pre-positioning troops is Fiji. This is about one hour's flying time from the New Hebrides. Furthermore I understand that UK forces in Fiji would be subject to our own Service jurisdiction.
8. Subject to the Defence Secretary's views I should be grateful for your approval to approach the Fiji Government, or another friendly government in the region, for their agreement to the precautionary deployment of a company size unit with HQ Element and signals support and for your authority for their subsequent deployment.

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9. We shall have an opportunity to discuss this briefly in OD this afternoon. I am copying this minute to other members of OD and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'C' with a horizontal stroke below it.

(CARRINGTON)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
10 June 1980

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