



I do not believe we should provide a next senior General. Whoever goes should be retired. Obvious

Prime Minister

(2)

The Foreign Secretary mentioned this at Cabinet. The risks are considerable but so are the stakes. A retired soldier would be best if the right man would be found.

FCS/80/120

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE

Zimbabwe: Command of the Armed Forces

Ph...

1. We have been aware for some time of the possibility that General Walls might leave his job before the end of the year and we were hoping to dissuade him. However, as you will know, matters have now come to a head and he has announced that he will depart at the end of the month.
2. Some weeks ago Mr Mugabe told our High Commissioner that if Walls were to leave he would look to us for a British General. Our High Commissioner expects to be summoned by Mr Mugabe with such a request in the next day or two.
3. I am very conscious of the risks of such an appointment. The job could prove extremely difficult. Relations with the ZIPRA and ZANLA Commanders would be crucial. If things went seriously wrong there might be little that a British Commander could do and we would inevitably come in for some of the blame. If the Zimbabwe forces were to get involved in a war with South Africa, we should find ourselves in a very difficult position. Moreover, the appointment of a British General will inevitably be seen as an acceptance of further responsibility for Zimbabwe's affairs, a responsibility from which we have so recently escaped.
4. Despite these risks, I have come to the conclusion that we should respond positively to Mr Mugabe. The fact is that any other likely alternative would lead us into much greater risks of a breakdown of the integration process and hence of stability in Zimbabwe. Our assessment is that none of the Rhodesian Security Force Commanders has the stature for the job. The appointment of a ZIPRA Commander is ruled out on political grounds. The appointment of General Nhongo, the ZANLA Commander, would probably be strongly urged on Mugabe by the Central Committee. We believe this would be disastrous for white morale, for the command of the forces and the

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process of integration. The only other possibility would be for Mugabe to appoint a General from a third country. The most likely possibilities would be Mozambique or a Commonwealth country, although it is possible that Mugabe might look even further afield, eg China or Romania. We believe that such an appointment would involve similar consequences for white morale and for the command of the forces and the integration process as would the appointment of Nhongo.

5. In these circumstances I have concluded, reluctantly, that I must ask you whether you could supply a British General for this purpose. As you will be aware, on a number of previous occasions we have provided a British commander for the army of an independent Commonwealth country, including Kenya, Pakistan and Ghana. There are obvious risks in involving ourselves further in Zimbabwe's problems. However, the appoint^{ment}/of a British General would be an important contribution to the task of tackling those problems; and would give us an opportunity to exercise a stabilising influence in the present tense situation.

6. The terms of service will have to be worked out with great care. The appointment should be limited in duration and it should be open to the British Government to withdraw the General at any time. The High Commissioner has suggested that we would be better able to distance HMG from the appointment by choosing a retired officer. While I see attractions in this, the essential point is to find the best candidate for the job. I would be grateful to know your views in the course of the day as we shall need to brief our High Commissioner very soon. I am copying this minute to the Prime Minister and the Lord President of the Council.

C
(CARRINGTON)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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