



PM/80/68

PRIME MINISTER

*Agree - reluctantly
not*

*Prime Minister
When you saw the CGS' report, you expressed doubts about this exercise. But it makes sense to prepare a short list of candidates, and it now seems that serving officers will have to be included. Agree?*

Zimbabwe - Command of the Armed Forces

1. You will have seen from Francis Pym's Private Secretary's letter of 14 August to my Private Secretary that problems have arisen over the three names we have put to Mr Mugabe as possible candidates to succeed General Walls. General King has written to the CGS to say he is no longer willing to serve. This is a pity. Lt Gen Blair is no longer considered suitable, and Maj Gen Strawson may be ruled out by Mugabe's apparent wish that the person chosen must be demonstrably senior to the present Commanders (who are Lt Gens).
2. Mugabe has not yet made up his mind that he wants a British General, and it is quite possible he will not look to us. I agree with Francis Pym that this would not matter, if Mugabe can find a good alternative. However, the possibility remains that he will, in the end, turn to us; and if he does, we must find the right man for the job. This is not just a matter of trying to be helpful. The amalgamation of the three armies is the key to stability in Zimbabwe and is essential to the maintenance of white morale, international confidence and the consolidation of all we have achieved there. Success is by no means certain, but the right Commander could obviously make a great difference.
3. Like you, I would prefer the appointment of a retired officer, but it now appears that the Ministry of Defence have run out of suitable retired officer candidates. I conclude that we should now be prepared to look to serving officers. Depending on Mr Mugabe's wishes and other practical considerations, a serving officer might go out on contract terms, in which case he would have to resign his commission for the duration of the appointment. I personally doubt, however, that it will make much difference to the public perception of the appointment whether the officer goes on loan service or contract terms. In practice, our exposure would be only marginally affected. I therefore hope that you can give your agreement to our putting forward one or two additional

*MAJ
27/
8*

/names



names from among serving officers, if Mugabe turns to us.

4. The CGS has recommended Lt Gen Kitson as outstandingly the best candidate. He is, however, still considering whether any other serving officer would be suitable and could be made available. The proposal to nominate Kitson is really rather difficult. The press might make something of his reputation as a tough internal security specialist and recall his activities during the Mau Mau campaign. This could stimulate opposition from the Left both here and in Zimbabwe. Unwelcome as this might be, it would not, in my view, be particularly damaging to us. If we were to put Kitson's name to Mugabe, we would have to give him full warning of what to expect so that he will be able to deal effectively with any criticism.

5. My conclusion is that we must try to identify one or two further candidates in case Mugabe does turn to us. These will have to be serving officers. We can take a final decision on names when the CGS has completed his consideration of other possible candidates in addition to Kitson.

6. I am sending a copy of this minute to Francis Pym.

C
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(CARRINGTON)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

26 August 1980