



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

3 June 1981

(2)

*Very worrying. It
involves the
underlying
Michael, etc.*

Prime Minister

And 4/6

North Korean Military Assistance to Zimbabwe

We received reports from Salisbury at the end of last week that the Zimbabweans might be on the point of accepting an offer of free military assistance from the North Koreans comprising equipment for a brigade and a training team of 100 men. The High Commissioner subsequently spoke to Mr Mugabe about the risks involved and it now looks as though Mugabe may at least postpone acceptance of the offer.

The North Koreans supported Mugabe's ZANLA forces during the Rhodesian conflict and Mugabe has maintained friendly relations, visiting North Korea in the course of an Asian tour last month. The offer of military assistance was originally made by the North Koreans early this year. The Commander of the British Military Training Team pointed out to the Zimbabweans at that time the dangers and difficulties involved in accepting it and the project was put on ice; but the North Koreans have suddenly sent three officers to negotiate arrangements for the deal and are apparently trying to bounce the Zimbabweans into a decision.

The fact that Mugabe seemed to have decided last week to accept the offer does not reflect any deliberate policy move against Western influences; but rather a combination of naivety in failing to recognise the international implications of such a move, a desire to establish non-aligned credentials and a reluctance to turn down a free and substantial offer of equipment. But the repercussions of accepting substantial numbers of North Korean instructors would be considerable. The Americans would react very strongly and their large aid commitment would be at risk. Bilateral relations with South Africa, already increasingly strained, would be exacerbated; and potential Western investors could be discouraged. The High Commissioner made these points to Mugabe.

We shall continue to watch this closely and Lord Carrington is prepared to send a personal message to Mugabe if necessary. We have discussed the problem with the Americans in order to preempt any premature reaction on their part following news of the Korean offer.

*Yours ever
R M J Lyne*

(R M J Lyne)

M O'D B Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street