

FM PEKING 020540Z DEC 82

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 806 OF 2/12/82

REPEATED FOR INFO TO IMMEDIATE HONG KONG

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FUTURE OF HONG KONG

1. IN ADVANCE OF LORD BELSTEAD'S VISIT TO HONG KONG YOU MAY FIND IT USEFUL TO HAVE MY VIEWS ON THE CURRENT POSITION.

2. IT IS NOW MORE THAN SIX WEEKS SINCE MY LAST CALL ON ZHANG WENJIN. I OFFERED SOME THOUGHTS ON THE REASONS BEHIND THIS LONG DELAY IN PARAGRAPH 3 OF MY TEL NO 795. IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT THE CHINESE ARE PUTTING US UNDER PRESSURE. BUT WHATEVER THE PRECISE REASONS I AM CONCERNED AT THEIR CONDUCT AND THE SITUATION IT CREATES: THEIR RESORT TO THE MEDIA IS NOT UNEXPECTED BUT THEIR FAILURE SO FAR TO TALK IS WORRYING. I IMAGINE THE GOVERNOR MUST BE THINKING SIMILARLY. THE DELAY PUTS US AND PARTICULARLY HONG KONG, UNDER SOME STRAIN AND TEMPTS US TO BREAK THE AGREEMENT ON CONFIDENTIALITY AS THEY HAVE DONE AND FOLLOW THE NATURAL INSTINCT TO SPEAK BACK. IT ALSO RISKS PUTTING US IN THE DISTASTEFUL POSITION OF TRYING TO DECEIVE OUR OWN PEOPLE THAT TALKS ARE IN HAND WHEN THEY ARE NOT.

3. I HAVE ALREADY ADVISED THAT IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE TO ENGAGE THE CHINESE IN A PUBLIC DEBATE. THE GOVERNOR TOO HAS DRAWN ATTENTION TO THE DANGERS OF NEGOTIATING THROUGH THE MEDIA OR EMBARKING ON A PROPAGANDA WAR WHICH WE COULD NOT HOPE TO WIN. THAT IS NOT TO SAY THAT WE SHOULD NOT TAKE SOME STEPS TO PROTECT OUR POSITION. I SUPPORT THE IDEA OF AN INSPIRED PQ (MY TEL NO 795 AND HONG KONG TEL NO1373) AND SOME SELECTIVE BRIEFING OF SENIOR MEDIA FIGURES (MY TEL NO 776 AND HONG KONG TEL NO 1341).

SUCH DEFENSIVE ACTION WILL HAVE TO BE CONDUCTED WITH CARE. IF IT TURNS INTO A COUNTERCHARGE IT COULD EXACERBATE THE DIFFICULTIES WE ARE ALREADY ENCOUNTERING BY PROVOKING THE CHINESE TO STATE THEIR IDEAS MORE FIRMLY AND IRREVERSIBLY THAN HITHERTO. MOREOVER WE MIGHT NEVER GET OUR SUBSTANTIVE TALKS. I THEREFORE BELIEVE THAT NOW IS NOT THE TIME TO RESPOND PUBLICLY TO THE CHINESE CAMPAIGN.



