

cc RJ

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PRIME MINISTER

FUTURE OF HONG KONG: CONTINGENCY PLANNING

I have seen your Private Secretary's letter of 9th February in which you asked to see a military assessment now rather than for FCO and MOD officials to carry forward contingency planning.

/ 2. I attach a note which sets out the current basis of military planning and gives a broad order of military effort which might be required to "defend" the colony. Further work can be done on military options, but not without this becoming known to a limited circle of military planners within and outside this building. I am myself at present discussing on a very restricted basis what might be done. But before setting any work in hand, I would welcome a word with you about what we are trying to achieve.

3. I am copying this minute to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Ministry of Defence
16th February 1983

Rummm
(Approved by the Defence Secretary and signed in his absence)

PERSONAL

HONG KONG - THREATS AND COUNTERMEASURES

INTRODUCTION

1. This note outlines the current military strength and roles of the Hong Kong Garrison and its planned reinforcements. In particular it considers the scope for military defensive measures against an influx of illegal immigrants contrived by Peking or against some form of direct attack.

THREAT

2. The 1982 JIC Report⁽¹⁾ reaffirmed the conclusion of the 1978 assessment that the Chinese leadership would not during the next 5 years make use of the military and economic means at their disposal for upsetting the status quo, and stated that this judgement remained valid for an extended period of at least a further five years. The most recent assessment⁽²⁾ suggested that the Chinese did not plan to use force in seeking to recover sovereignty over Hong Kong.

INTERNAL SECURITY

3. There are many ways in which China could put pressure on Hong Kong without resorting to military action. It could simply cut off normal supplies by land or sea, creating enormous logistic problems, particularly with food and water and leading to a loss of public confidence and a threat to Internal Security. If public order did break down, China would normally wish to help the Hong Kong Government in order to preserve its own economic interests but, if circumstances were to change, such a situation could also be provoked in order to provide an excuse for, or a support to, Chinese intervention. Quick action would then be necessary if the situation was not to escalate out of control.

4. Certainly internal unrest, perhaps stirred up by Peking, has always been rated the greatest potential danger and Internal

Notes:

(1) JIC 82(N)70

(2) JIC(83)(1A)4 of 24 January 1983

Security clearly recognised as the primary role of the Hong Kong Garrison, with the whole Police and Military organisation geared towards it.

5. The Garrison. The Garrison is composed in the main of infantry. Twenty-three rifle companies are available, to which should be added a Police equivalent of thirty companies. Support weapons such as armoured cars and artillery were withdrawn in the last decade as was the on-station frigate. Remaining naval support is limited to five Patrol Craft. The air support (eight Wessex helicopters) provides some mobility for a small quick reaction force which is tailored strictly to the internal security task.

6. Reinforcements. The reinforcements earmarked are also related closely to the primary role: the bulk are made up of three infantry battalions adding a further thirteen companies to the Security Forces. This brings the total company strength to sixty-six. The earliest reinforcements would be from the Gurkha battalion stationed in Brunei, which could arrive acclimatised in Hong Kong in twenty-four hours. Most of the reinforcements from the UK could be there within seven days. In sum these reinforcements are deemed adequate to maintain internal security and confidence within Hong Kong.

MASS INFLUX

7. A mass influx of people from China poses a different problem, varying in difficulty dependent upon the scale. However there are some precedents and plans have been kept up to date. An influx of 180,000 was dealt with in 1962. An arrest rate of over 100,000 was reached in 1979 and 1980. The present rate is around 10,000 a year. All were returned to China peacefully. These events have led to a number of border control measures, including three fence systems aimed at giving adequate warning, restricting entry and channelling a mass influx into areas where they could be held and subsequently re-cycled to China. Additional communication blocks and holding camps are planned. Thus there is a high rate of preparedness, practical expertise and a number of contingency plans.

8. However none of these scenarios has ever envisaged a Peking orchestrated mass influx. Previously the Chinese authorities have always accepted the people back. If there was to be a planned influx both by land and by sea - and in the latter case our strength is particularly limited - and if there were no possibility of return, then the resources of the Hong Kong Government, including even a reinforced garrison, would become overwhelmed - how soon depending upon numbers and rate of arrival. The Security Forces could give a robust response but for a limited time only.

DIRECT ATTACK

General

9. Because there are so many other ways for China to put pressure on Hong Kong, direct military attack has never been rated as anything but a very low possibility. Nevertheless China naturally does have the ability to mount either an attack in overwhelming strength or a naval and air blockade, and there has always been a slight possibility of some local maverick action resulting from loss of central control by Peking and reversion to regional War Lords. Now, in the event of a breakdown or stalemate in negotiations, a threat of attack might once again become a factor to be considered.

Secondary Role

10. At the moment although the Garrison does have a secondary role of conventional defence, this in practice means no more than maintaining the territorial integrity of Hong Kong against minor incursions (against which it could give a good account of itself) and, in the event of a larger scale attack, defining aggression, i.e. establishing the facts and clearly showing up the aggression for what it is. Subsequent action would depend on the strength of the attack and political decision at the time; but the current garrison, focussing as it does on Internal Security, is manifestly not structured for prolonged defensive action on any scale and the reinforcement plans as constituted do not add much to that capability. There is no airborne early warning, very limited reconnaissance capability, no counter mine or air defence capability,

no artillery or armour and very limited anti-armour capability. Moreover, although limited war training does of course take place, and the subject is studied fairly regularly, it is of a non-specific nature and no formal defence plans or prepared defence positions exist.

11. To make a comparison, and when such a threat was thought to exist in 1950 at the time of the Korean War, plans to defend Hong Kong called for two divisions (30,000 men) with full supporting arms and air and naval support of some strength.

12. A strengthened garrison would still be at a great disadvantage against a Peking inspired deliberate attack, which would have access from the sea right round Hong Kong as well as across the restricted land border. They would be able to exert on the civilian population enormous psychological pressures, as well as the hardships of blockade. The vast civilian population within a small area would also seriously inhibit our ability to sustain a defence of the colony.

SUMMARY

13. To summarize, and answer the questions set:

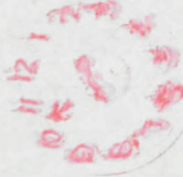
a. The Garrison and police, together with the three reinforcement battalions, are geared solely for internal security. The full reinforced strength of police and military is sixty-six companies, and is judged to be sufficient for the purpose.

b. The Hong Kong Government and the Garrison have plans to deal with a mass influx of people. There are certain aids to control/ⁱⁿ such an eventuality and to help hold people well forward in the border area. However, all these plans assume that China will readily accept the people back. An orchestrated plan would overwhelm the civil authorities in Hong Kong.

c. The Garrison could deal with a small scale incursion, but would be limited to establishing the facts of any large scale attack. It is not equipped or structured to carry out a conventional defence. The Garrison has a very limited capability, particularly at sea and in the air, no prepared positions, and no formal defence plans.

1 d. There are at present no plans to enhance this capability in any substantial way.

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

9 February, 1983

FUTURE OF HONG KONG: CONTINGENCY PLANNING

In your letter of 3 February you outlined a number of steps which you thought necessary to carry forward contingency planning. The Prime Minister is not at present persuaded that these steps are necessary. She considers that the first requirement is that the military assessment which was commissioned in my letter of 5 January to Richard Mottram should be made available. I hope that the Prime Minister can receive this in the very near future.

[Handwritten signature]

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

del

A. J. COLES

J. Holmes, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

NR.

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PRIME MINISTER

Future of Hong Kong : Contingency Planning

I wrote to MOD on 6 January (copy attached) asking that the Chiefs of Staff produce contingency plans.

I have since discussed progress on several occasions. A paper has existed for some time. But Mr. Heseltine is not yet fully satisfied with it. He discussed it with the Chiefs of Staff last week, as a result of which some further work is to be done. I am told that we can expect to receive the paper at the end of this week, following another meeting between the Defence Secretary and the Chiefs.

At an earlier stage the FCO suggested that they should make an input since a very small number of officials there are engaged in civil contingency planning and are in touch with the Governor about the work he is doing on these matters. I said that they should certainly coordinate their work with the MOD *but that they should not enlarge but they enlarged* the group of people who are already involved in the Hong Kong issue.

The FCO now suggest (see letter attached) that:

- ? (a) a small steering group of FCO and MOD officials be established to coordinate London and Hong Kong contingency planning;
- No (b) this group should hold a meeting with the Hong Kong General ^{Affairs} ~~Forces~~ Secretary, who has been designated by the Governor to look after planning at the Hong Kong end and who is to visit London this month;
- (c) with strict regard to security, other Whitehall departments should be consulted about certain aspects of the contingency planning, eg the Home Office on immigration and the Treasury and the Bank of England on currency support and other financial matters.

No Are you content with these arrangements?

No - I asked for a military assessment A.D.C. over a month ago - note the reluctance



The National Archives

LETTERCODE/SERIES <i>PREM 19</i>	Date and sign
PIECE/ITEM <i>1053</i> (one piece/item number)	
Extract/Item details: <i>Minute Coles to PM dated 7/2/1983</i>	
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TOP SECRET

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

3 February 1983

Dear Ian,

Future of Hong Kong: Contingency Planning

The restricted meeting between FCO and Ministry of Defence officials to discuss contingency planning for Hong Kong (your letter of 17 January) was held on 27 January. Tentative agreement was reached on the next step in the process.

In the view of the meeting, this should be the establishment of a small steering group (3 FCO and 3 MOD officials), which would produce contingency plans co-ordinated with those already set in hand by the Hong Kong Government (HKG). Close contact with the Hong Kong Government would be needed. It was agreed that it would be useful to hold a meeting in February with the Secretary (General Affairs), appointed by the Governor as the Hong Kong Government's contingency planning co-ordinator, during his forthcoming visit to London for other business.

The group considered that, in addition to the FCO and MOD, other Government Departments would need to be involved on certain aspects of contingency planning. Important examples would be the Home Office (on immigration and allied questions) and the Treasury and Bank of England (currency support and other financial matters). Any co-option of other Departments would need to be done with very strict regard to security. The best procedure would be for Sir Antony Acland to write to his colleagues as and when appropriate asking them to nominate officials who could be consulted on specific points.

We would be grateful to know whether the Prime Minister is content with these arrangements.

/I am

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET



I am sending a copy of this letter to Richard
Mottram (Ministry of Defence).

Yours ever

(J E Holmes)
Private Secretary

John Holmes

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

TOP SECRET

M-K - Future of : PG 4.

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

5 January 1983

HONG KONG

As part of our continuing consideration of the problem of the future of Hong Kong, the Prime Minister would find it helpful to have an assessment by the Chiefs of Staff of what scope there may be for reinforcing and defending Hong Kong if it appears at any point in the future that China is likely to attempt to achieve its objectives in the Colony by forcible means - either by direct military action or by other means, for example by engineering a massive influx of Chinese into the Colony.

I should emphasise that:

- (a) The Prime Minister's request for an assessment derives solely from her concern that all aspects of the problem should have been thoroughly examined and does not imply any change in her wish to achieve a solution, if possible, through talks with the Chinese.
- (b) It is of great importance to the conduct of our talks with the Chinese that the fact that such an assessment is being prepared should not become publicly known. The Prime Minister has therefore asked that knowledge of its preparation should be confined to the smallest possible number of people.

Could you please let me know as soon as possible when you would expect the assessment to be available for the Prime Minister's consideration.

I am sending copies of this letter to Brian Fall (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

A. J. COLES

Richard Mottram, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence.

SECRET

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MR COLES

HONG KONG

When Sir Frank Cooper paid his farewell visit on the Prime Minister, he said how worried he was about the prospects for Hong Kong. He thought that there was no prospect that the Chinese would agree to anything less than full sovereignty and control, but this would be very prejudicial to the interest of a large number of Hong Kong residents, many of whom had originally been refugees from the Chinese. However, Sir Frank Cooper said - and the Prime Minister agreed - that there was no realistic prospect of defending Hong Kong from the Chinese if they were determined to take it over.

In the course of a brief discussion, Sir Frank Cooper said that contingency plans were being made for the maintenance of internal order in Hong Kong. But he suggested that it would be wise for the Prime Minister to ask the Chiefs of Staff to let her have their professional assessment of the scope for reinforcing and defending Hong Kong in the event of external aggression. Sir Frank Cooper suggested that it would be a defence for the Prime Minister to say that she had obtained this assessment.

The Prime Minister agreed and asked me to arrange to obtain an assessment of this sort. Since this is not immediately urgent, I have not acted on it because I thought that it might be easier for you to frame such a request in the context of the rest of policy towards Hong Kong without raising the alarms which such a request, coming out of the blue, might cause.

F.R.B.

SECRET

24 December 1982



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

46A

10 January 1983

Dear Sir,

Hong Kong: Chiefs of Staff Assessment

A3 — Your letter of 5 January to Richard Mottram asked for an assessment by the Chiefs of Staff on the reinforcement and defence of Hong Kong. While noting what you say about the need for this to be confined to a very small group of people, we think it is likely that part of the work would overlap with the contingency planning for a 'worst case' situation which was described in my letter to you of 18 October 1982. Since then an outline paper has been agreed with Hong Kong describing the problems which might occur in the case of a variety of civil and military contingencies. The latter include a threat to internal security, a sea or air blockade by the Chinese and increased illegal immigration from China. The paper does not cover full-scale resistance to a Chinese attack but does deal with graduated withdrawal and action which might delay an attack. This outline is now being fleshed out.

We had already told the MOD that contingency planning was under way, suggesting that we awaited Hong Kong's proposals before undertaking detailed discussion in London. We think that the time has now come to get such discussion under way.

If the Prime Minister agrees we will make arrangements with the MOD for a very restricted meeting on the subject. This would be of some assistance to the Chiefs of Staff in their assessment task, and would help to avoid overlap and duplication.

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram (MOD) and to Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever

(J E Holmes)
Private SecretaryA J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street



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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

17 January, 1983

HONG KONG: CHIEFS OF STAFF ASSESSMENT

Thank you for your letter of 10 January.

I am sure that the Prime Minister would wish you to proceed with your proposal for a very restricted meeting between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence with regard to contingency planning for Hong Kong, particularly since you have already done a good deal of work on this subject. But the Prime Minister would hope that it would not be necessary to enlarge the group of people who have already been involved in this matter.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

A. J. COLES

J.E. Holmes, Esq.,

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

TOP SECRET

Hong Kong

Mr. Parry asked the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current military presence in Hong Kong.

Mr. Blaker: The garrison demonstrates our commitment to the integrity and security of Hong Kong. The size of the permanent garrison was agreed with the Hong Kong Government during negotiation of the 1981 defence costs agreement. The main elements are five infantry battalions, Gurkha engineer, signals and transport squadrons, RAF and Army helicopter squadrons, and five Royal Navy patrol craft. To counter high levels of illegal immigration, the garrison has been temporarily reinforced in the past, but the only additional element remaining is a Royal Marines raiding squadron.