

(2)

14 March 1983

*JH*

Hong Kong

The Prime Minister has seen Hong Kong telegram No. 334 which describes a report in the Hong Kong press that an internal Chinese document circulating on the mainland reveals China's intention of resuming sovereignty in September this year.

Mrs. Thatcher has commented that this appears to be a completely new development. She has asked whether we can obtain any further information. I should be grateful for your early ~~comments~~.

JOHN COLES

John Holmes, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

*This is totally new to us - can we find out any more info?*

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FM HONG KONG 110504Z MAR 83  
TO IMMEDIATE F C O  
TELEGRAM NUMBER 334 OF 11 MARCH  
INFO IMMEDIATE PEKING  
INFO ROUTINE HONG KONG GOVERNMENT OFFICE LONDON

**FUTURE OF HONG KONG : PRESS COVERAGE**

THE INDEPENDENT ORIENTAL DAILY AND THE PRO-KMT HONG KONG TIMES ON 11 MARCH CARRY AS THEIR FRONT PAGE LEAD A REPORT THAT AN INTERNAL CHINESE DOCUMENT CIRCULATING ON THE MAINLAND REVEALS CHINA'S INTENTION OF RESUMING SOVEREIGNTY IN SEPTEMBER THIS YEAR. BOTH NEWSPAPERS APPEAR TO BE QUOTING THE SAME SOURCE, BUT THERE ARE DIFFERENCES OF DETAIL BETWEEN THE TWO STORIES. THE ORIENTAL DAILY DOES NOT MENTION THE DATE OF SEPTEMBER, BUT WE KNOW FROM THE EDITORIAL STAFF THAT THEIR SOURCE REFERRED TO SEPTEMBER AND THE PAPER DECIDED NOT TO PUBLISH THE DATE. THE ORIENTAL DAILY SAYS THAT THE SOURCE OF THE INFORMATION IS A COPY OF REFERENCE NEWS "CAN KAO XIAO XI" SEEN BY HONG KONG RESIDENTS RETURNING FROM A VISIT TO FUJIAN. THE HONG KONG TIMES IS LESS EXPLICIT ABOUT THE SOURCE, BUT DOES MENTION THE SEPTEMBER DATE. THE SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST ON 11 MARCH REFERS TO THE ORIENTAL DAILY AND HONG KONG TIMES STORIES ON AN INSIDE PAGE.

2. THE EDITOR OF THE HONG KONG TIMES TELEPHONED THE DIRECTOR OF INFORMATION SERVICES LAST NIGHT ABOUT THE STORY AND ASKED FOR A COMMENT. HE WAS TOLD THAT THE HONG KONG GOVERNMENT HAD NO COMMENT TO MAKE. THE HONG KONG TIMES' STORY QUOTES A GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN AS SAYING THAT THE HONG KONG GOVERNMENT HAD HEARD NOTHING OF THE SORT.

3. TRANSLATIONS OF THE TWO ARTICLES ARE BEING FACSIMILIED TO THE LONDON OFFICE.

HADDON-CAVE

**FUTURE OF HONG KONG**

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MR MARTIN ASSESSMENTS STAFF  
CABINET OFFICE  
HONG KONG GOVT OFFICE LONDON



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister

This is a fascinating and  
potentially very important report.

But it is not at all clear how  
much reliance we can place on it.

I propose to ask for the most  
thorough possible assessment  
of the reliability of the report  
as an indication of the real  
intentions of Peking. Agree?

A. J. C.  $\frac{15}{3}$

Yes no

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*From the Secretary of the Cabinet*

Mr Coles

You may wish to be aware of the attached CX report (for return pre).

*R. H. J.*



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

Prime Minister

15 March 1983

A.S.C. 16/3

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Dear John,

Future of Hong Kong

Thank you for your letter of 14 March about a report in the Hong Kong press that China intends to resume sovereignty over Hong Kong in September.

We are asking Hong Kong and Peking if they have any further comments. Should they have anything to add to what is below we shall let you know.

We have seen no collateral whatsoever for this report. Its apparent source, 'Reference News', is a digest of foreign press news items translated into Chinese for readers with a particular need for knowledge of overseas events. It is not a mouthpiece of Party or Government. It is therefore a most unlikely vehicle for announcing what would be a major decision by China's central leadership.

It is significant that later the same day (11 March) the pro-Communist Hong Kong newspaper 'New Evening Post' described the report as 'a clumsy distortion' and 'a rumour ... far from the truth'. Aware of the harmful effect such a report can have on confidence, the 'New Evening Post' also said that the rumour ran contrary to the aim of maintaining Hong Kong's stability and prosperity. We know that rumours about a Chinese announcement in June have been circulating in Hong Kong and it is possible that this has been distorted and confused with China's plan to recover sovereignty at a specified date ie 1997.

Yours ever

(J E Holmes)  
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq  
10 Downing Street

Hong Kong 1945  
Future 1

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DATE 12/27/2012 BY 60322/UC/STP

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

MR. HATFIELD  
Cabinet Office

Negotiations with the Chinese on Hong Kong

The Prime Minister has seen Mr. Savage's minute of 16 March and the attached containing comments by a senior Chinese official about the negotiations on the future of Hong Kong. - refer to R7A  
2/13/83

The Prime Minister regards this as a potentially very important report but is not clear as to how much reliance we can place on it. She would therefore be grateful for the most thorough possible assessment of the reliability of the report as an indication of the real intentions of Peking. I should be grateful if you could put this in hand.

I am copying this letter to Brian Fall (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence).

A. J. COLES

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RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3 (4)  
OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT

18 March, 1983

15A

CONFIDENTIAL

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GPS 63

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FM HONG KONG 040507Z MAR 83  
TO IMMEDIATE FCO  
TELEGRAM NUMBER 297 OF 4 MARCH 1983  
INFO IMMEDIATE PEKING

FUTURE OF HONG KONG

1. ACCORDING TO A VERY RESPONSIBLE SOURCE THERE IS A RUMOUR IN BUSINESS CIRCLES TO THE EFFECT THAT IT IS BEING SAID IN PEKING THAT IF BRITAIN DOES NOT CONCEDE SOVEREIGNTY THE CHINESE WILL ANNOUNCE THEIR PLAN FOR HONG KONG IN JUNE.

YOUDE

FUTURE OF HONG KONG

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