



MO 5/14

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Prime Minister

PRIME MINISTER

A. J. C. 15/3

2(c) of Annex
 A needs further
 thoughts.
 "Such resistance
 or may be appropriate
 can we not spend further
 what effort in
 possible counter-
 HONG KONG
 the level of response
 would be with the
 facilities we have
 not

In his letter of 4th March your Private Secretary asked for a paper on the action that we should take if the Chinese attempted an armed invasion of Hong Kong at any time between now and 1997 and for a brief account of previous occasions when we had reinforced the Hong Kong garrison.

2. I attach a note which sets out some of the earlier history, present Chinese capabilities and options open to them, and possible British options. Paragraph 18 of the attachment and its annex describe the current position of our Commander in Hong Kong should the Chinese invade from a standing start - the point which you raised with me at our meeting. Our current reinforcement plan was set out in my earlier advice of 16th February: essentially it involves 3 infantry battalions which could reach Hong Kong quickly (one from Brunei within 24 hours).

3. We can take the consideration of military options somewhat further within the small circle I have involved here and bringing in - as I intend to - our Commander in Hong Kong, General Boorman, who will be in the UK after Easter. This will, however, fall short of the preparation of full contingency plans. To do that, we should need to involve a wider circle here and to bring in more people in Hong Kong, particularly to assess how we might respond to the options discussed in Paragraph 17 of the attachment. Subject to your views, I would not propose to widen the circle in this way given the risk of this leaking and being interpreted in ways which cut across our careful negotiating effort.



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

See 113

Ministry of Defence
18th March 1983

Hoy Key Hi

future



(NOT TO BE PHOTOCOPIED)

2051/1

HONG KONG

PRECEDENTS AND OPTIONS FOR MILITARY ACTION

INTRODUCTION

1. This note outlines precedents and options for military action in response to an external threat to Hong Kong. In particular, and as a preliminary, it briefly sets out the situation when Hong Kong was threatened by China at the end of its civil war and during the Korean war; notes some essential changes in the situation as between then and the current relative position today; and spells out a range of possible options for the future.

THE GARRISON IN THE PAST

2. In the late forties and early fifties it was thought possible that China would take military action against Hong Kong. The Chinese civil war had ended in favour of the Communists and they had closed up to the border. The Garrison, maintained at a strong level in the aftermath of the defeat of the Japanese in 1945, was therefore built up and plans were made to defend Hong Kong from attack. As the international situation further deteriorated with the Korean war, our own force level in Hong Kong was maintained at a high strength and defensive positions with wire and mines were prepared well forward near the border.

3. The general capability of our forces in the region at that time and other pertinent facts can be viewed under four main headings:

a. In Place Forces. The unreinforced garrison was of divisional size, with an armoured regiment, medium and field artillery, and heavy and light anti-aircraft regiments. The RAF had air defence and attack aircraft. The RN had a considerable number of ships on station supported by a major dockyard facility. The total garrison was over 25,000.

b. In Theatre Reinforcements. Substantial reinforcements of all three Services were in South East Asia, notable among which were the Far East Fleet based on Singapore and the airforces available in Singapore and Malaya.

c. Allied Forces. The United States Seventh Fleet dominated the Pacific. The United States was in direct confrontation with the Communist regime, controlled the China Sea and provided active protection for Taiwan, Quemoy and Matsu. The US was the only power with nuclear capable forces.

d. United Nations Forces. Communist China was not a member of the UN. The United Nations countries opposed to the invasion of South Korea (some 19 nations gave physical support) were committed to fight against Communist aggression outside China's borders.

4. It is not known, without further detailed research, to what extent the US or UN might have become involved, but China could not have been certain that they would not have done so; and the deterrent effect of this must have been considerable.

5. If these forces had been attacked, they would have fought and would certainly have done as well if not a great deal better than was done against the Japanese in 1941: and the battle might have taken much the same form with defensive engagements on at least two lines in the New Territories followed, if necessary, by a fighting withdrawal to a redoubt on Hong Kong Island. In this way time would have been gained during which it would have been hoped to invoke US and possibly UN intervention.

6. The only subsequent reinforcements which HMG have undertaken in Hong Kong are:

a. 1967/68. At the time of the Cultural Revolution one infantry battalion was sent from Singapore to reinforce the Garrison.

b. 1979/80. At the height of the illegal immigrant influx, companies from the infantry battalion in Brunei were brought up to Hong Kong, and an infantry battalion flew out from UK. In addition, a Royal Navy hovercraft, a fast patrol boat, a detachment of Royal Marines from the Raiding Squadron, and extra helicopters were sent from UK.

SOME CHANGED FACTORS: THEN AND NOW

7. There are three main changes which materially alter our military reactions to an external threat:

a. Military Balance. In the fifties our forces were strong, well structured with a full range of support weapons and supplied from well stocked bases in the same region: the Chinese army was basically infantry, slow moving and poorly supported. Now we have a garrison structured primarily for internal security with no other bases in region: China has emerged with much stronger forces including air and naval support and nuclear weapons systems. Although still less sophisticated than their western counterparts they can nevertheless pose a formidable threat if not matched by modern and sophisticated weapons on our side.

b. Allies. The United States, although strong in the area, could not now be counted on for physical support. Her forces are primarily matching and masking the greatly increased Soviet threat. She would at the very least discourage any entanglement by our forces with China which might disrupt stability and would almost certainly offer no aid.

c. Hong Kong Development. In 1950 the population was 2.5M of which 1M had recently fled from the revolution: it was largely anti-communist and nationalist in sentiment. It is now well over 5M with a significant pro-communist element as well as a residual nationalist faction. The majority may not wish to live under a communist regime, but they are all in awe of Peking. The population is urbanized, living in new townships of upwards of 100 thousand, some of which are located in areas close to the border where we would have been prepared to fight under previous plans. The sympathies of these people, once fighting was likely, could not be relied upon; moreover such a large population has become dependent upon sophisticated facilities which could be so easily knocked out early in any conflict.

CHINESE CAPABILITIES

8. The use of military force by China is only one of her options. She may do nothing or keep negotiations going inconclusively, in order to allow uncertainty to undermine our position. She may also orchestrate a massive influx of illegal immigrants, sabotage public utilities or instigate unrest. Nevertheless, she could in the last resort (although this is unlikely because it is altogether unnecessary) exercise the military option by first intimidating, then threatening the air, sea and land approaches and finally by invading to repossess Hong Kong. To do this China has adequate forces available close at hand in the GUANGZHOU Military Region.

9. GUANGZHOU Military Region (MR). This region which includes the provinces of GUANGDONG, GUANXI HUNAN and HAINAN island is the MR immediately adjacent to Hong Kong. Within the Region there are 20 Main Force Divisions which together with supporting arms total over 422,000 troops.

10. GUANDONG Military District (MD). There are 9 Divisions:

a. 42 Army (3 Divisions plus Artillery, Armour and Anti-aircraft units).

b. 55 Army (3 Divisions plus Artillery, Armour and Anti-aircraft units).

c. One Artillery Division Main Force (MF).

d. Two Lower Category Divisions.

Of these 42 Army is located immediately North of Hong Kong, within a geographical area of 350 miles by 150 miles.

11. Border Area. There are no MF units deployed along the frontier, since MF units are held in depth. The border itself is manned by troops of 116 Border Defence Regiment, supported by Public Security Bureau Troops and Customs Health and Immigration Officers.

12. Army Capability. The Chinese Communist Army remains an infantry force with little sophisticated equipment, and, although well equipped with light weapons, it is still comparatively weak in heavy armour and some artillery support. It is also short of wheeled vehicles, Armoured Personnel Carriers and adequate supporting vehicles. Nevertheless, its strength is very considerable.

13. Air Force (GUANGZHOU MR)

Bombers	-	76	
Air Defence	-	MIG 19-17	54 (all weather)
		MIG 15, 17, 19-21	617 (day)
			<u>671</u>
Ground Attack	-	MIG 15 and 45	27
TOTAL		<u>801</u>	

14. Navy (South China Sea Fleet)

Attack Submarines	13
DD	1
Frigates	7
Landing Ships	20
Missile Attack Craft	30
Small ships/craft	80

COURSES OPEN TO CHINA AND OUR MILITARY RESPONSE

15. In general terms there are four differing scenarios which may require a military response:

a. China contributes to rising tension by increasing military preparations in GUANGZHOU Military Region (sabre rattling).

b. China takes provocative action short of military invasion (closes road/rail links, cuts water, food and commodities or restricts sea or air access).

c. China invades with little or no warning using those forces close to Hong Kong in GUANDONG Military District (the "standing start" invasion).

d. China invades after a period of tension during which the UK would have had time to reinforce.

16. Period of Tension. China could create a period of tension by making provocative political initiatives or carrying out military manoeuvres within her borders. In such a period we for our part could show resolve or take action which might be termed as "raising the stakes" or a form of deterrence. Apart from political response, full deterrence would require massive

counter measures but for raising the stakes and making it clear that we could not be intimidated something less may be relevant. The range runs from a symbolic gesture of deploying some air defence equipment through to deploying a Fleet Task Force. All of these will require detailed research, and all will involve degrees of penalties for our forces elsewhere in the world. As examples, we could:

- a. a. Set up a formal Intelligence Early Warning Indicator System: this is in hand now.
- b. Institute regular Nimrod and Canberra early warning intelligence gathering flights from Kai Tak airport. If Kai Tak were obstructed, Nimrod only could be used with American help from the Philippines or from another base made available in South East Asia: this is unlikely.
- c. Increase local exercises and reinforcement exercises: possible with considerable penalty.
- d. Increase stockpiles of defence stores and ammunition including that required for heavier support weapons: possible but costly.
- e. Set up stockpiles of heavy weapons, ie tanks, guns etc: very costly and to detriment of main roles in NATO.
- f. Plan defensive positions and carry out command post exercises: possible but eventually overt.
- g. Deploy air defence systems: possible with considerable detriment.
- h. Construct defensive positions: this would be a highly overt move.
- i. Deploy a Fleet Task Force either over the horizon or close at hand to Hong Kong. Currently a Fleet Deployment is planned for 83/84. To have it available in the Hong Kong area over a long period would entail delays to planned programmes and the deployment of additional logistic support - all to the continuing detriment of NATO forces.

17. Chinese Provocative Action Short of Invasion.

a. China could apply pressure on Hong Kong in numerous forms short of invasion. Examples range from closing Kai Tak International Airport, through a blockade of the sea approaches to a cut in road or rail links and the necessary food or water supplies. The effect of such restrictions in the highly urbanised society of Hong Kong could be quite out of proportion to the events themselves and could quickly lead to acute anxiety, internal disorder, a breakdown in confidence and a flight of capital. Such a course is highly unlikely to be adopted by the Chinese at present but it cannot be disregarded in the future.

b. If such a sequence of events became extended a severe strain would be placed upon the security forces and early

reinforcement would be required. The Hong Kong Government are already examining contingency plans for the civil emergencies. Joint Theatre Plans exist now for rapid reinforcement of the UK Garrison to cope with internal unrest and some refinements of these plans are in hand with Commander British Forces Hong Kong. Further detailed work has not been carried out on the particular problems of sea and air blockade: these will require wide range of consultation in order to produce realistic plans. The sensitivity of the subject precludes such action at present.

18. The Standing Start Invasion. Without a warning of aggression our current Garrison, organised as it is for internal security would fight in accordance with their current directive (relevant directive extracts are attached at Annex A). Initially their aim would be to define aggression in the border area. Subsequently, they would fight from strong points either in the hills or in the townships. They would continue for as long as possible or until the Governor as Commander-in-Chief ordered a halt. Realistically they could not hold out long.

19. The Invasion after Tension and Reinforcement.

a. Some or all of the action we would take during a period of tension might contribute to a pause in Chinese decision making and considerations: how long that pause would be is highly problematical. Nevertheless although the Chinese forces are formidable, all locally available and backed by much greater strength, the decision to commit them, accept casualties and engage in war as an aggressor still has to be taken and will be unpalatable in terms of international relations and the position over Taiwan.

b. For UK to resist aggression for more than a short period, and discounting any consideration of the effect on the civilian population, a force of the following general size would be the minimum needed:

(1) Land Forces

A divisional headquarters and signal regiment

An armoured reconnaissance regiment

Two armoured regiments

Two brigades complete, in addition to the existing and reinforced brigade

Medium and heavy artillery

An Air Defence Regiment and Blowpipe detachments

An Engineer Regiment

Divisional logistic units

(2) Air Forces

Two squadrons of attack aircraft

Two squadrons of air defence aircraft

Support units

(3) Naval Forces

One CVS Task Group

Six frigates FF/DD

One squadron of minesweepers

Four SSN

Amphibious support

c. The implications of deploying such a force need little emphasis but remain considerable. Units would have to be taken, for the most part, from our forces assigned to NATO. Movement and logistic support would entail the bulk of our available assets and would require substantial extra civilian resources, possibly over a protracted period. Finally, the sustainability of such a force would depend upon secure base facilities and stockpiles in the theatre.

ANNEX A TO
2051/1
DATED: 18 MAR 83

EXTRACTS FROM DIRECTIVE TO THE COMMANDER BRITISH FORCES HONG KONG

"STRATEGIC AIM

1. To maintain the British position in Hong Kong in accordance with the policy of HM Government.

TASK

2. Your task is to assist the Hong Kong Government to maintain stability and security and to sustain confidence in HMG's intention to maintain the British position in the Colony. You are:

a. to support the Civil Administration and Police:

(1) in the maintenance of law and order within the Colony and on its frontiers;

(2) in dealing with natural disasters and similar eventualities;

b. to be prepared, in the event of rising tension between the Hong Kong Government/HMG and the Chinese Government, to deploy such force as may be necessary to sustain confidence and discourage armed incursions or aggression, in accordance with political direction at the time;

c. to be prepared, in the event of Chinese armed aggression, to identify such aggression and to offer such resistance as may be appropriate in the circumstances then prevailing in accordance with political direction at the time.

3. Where necessary to assist you in these tasks it will be the responsibility of the Chiefs of Staff to provide you with reinforcements, the scale of which will be as set out in the relevant contingency plan. You may make requests for reinforcements in addition to these, but there can be no guarantee that they will be made available. Your plans must therefore be based on the scale of reinforcements specified in the approved contingency plan."

PRIME MINISTER

Hong Kong

You minuted on the attached papers that paragraph 2c of Annex A needed further thought. Could you tell me what you had in mind - so that I can commission further work?

A. S. C.

24 March 1983

S/S Deputy to
PM 18/3



B/F

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JP

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

4 March 1983

HONG KONG

Your Secretary of State had a brief discussion with the Prime Minister this afternoon about the Hong Kong problem. It was agreed that a paper should be prepared on the action which we should take if the Chinese attempted an armed invasion of Hong Kong at any time between now and 1997. The difficulties were fully recognised in the discussion but the Prime Minister feels that it is essential that planning of this kind is set in hand. She would be grateful to see a paper on these lines as soon as possible.

The Prime Minister also expressed interest in previous occasions when we had reinforced the Hong Kong garrison to deal with Chinese threats. She would be grateful for a brief account of those situations and, so far as these can be ascertained, the steps which we had in mind to take to counter such threats if they materialised.

ajc

Richard Motttram, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence.

TOP SECRET

PRIME MINISTER

Hong Kong

Mr. Heseltine is coming to see you
at 2.30 on Friday.

He is looking for broad guidance
on the kind of military contingency
planning which he should prepare in the
MOD.

I attach his minute of 16 February
which covered a military assessment.
I also attach a minute by Mr. Jackling.

A.J.C.

3 March, 1983

TOP SECRET