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Prime Minister



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

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29 March 1983

Agree that the Australians should be given a general briefing about Hong Kong but should not be given details of our talks with the Chinese?

Yes - but they must not be told too much. We have as yet no idea about how they would handle information.

A.J.C. 29/3.

Dear John,

Future of Hong Kong: Briefing the Australians prior to Premier Zhao's visit to Australia

The Chinese Premier, Zhao Ziyang, is visiting Australia from 17 to 23 April, following a visit to New Zealand.

Australia has an important relationship with China and at the same time has considerable business interests in Hong Kong. We have therefore been considering:

- a. offering the Australians some up-to-date briefing, and
- b. asking whether they would be prepared to make some general points to the Chinese.

Sir John Mason has reported that Hong Kong is very likely to come up in discussion and has suggested that the Australians would welcome a briefing on Chinese intentions, with defensive talking points. He also thinks that they would be willing to make general points about, eg the need to ensure the continuing stability of Hong Kong. However, he has cautioned against going too far in telling them about our talks with the Chinese or in any way appearing to involve them in the negotiating process. We strongly agree with this. We believe that we should give the new Australian Government a general picture of the background to the Hong Kong problem, with enough information to show that we recognise that they have important interests in Hong Kong. If we do not do something on these lines they will only have the Chinese side of the story. But it would be a mistake to go further. We should concentrate on our assessment of the Chinese ideas on Hong Kong and why they are viewed with so much scepticism, both in London and in Hong Kong. Points we should like the Australians to make, if they consider it appropriate, would focus on why and how Hong Kong works as successfully as it does, and how vital the present systems are to its continued stability and prosperity.

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In addition we suggest that it would be helpful if Sir John Mason were authorised to brief the appropriate top officials (Sir G Yeend and Messrs Henderson and Cook) and, if possible, the new Foreign Minister, Mr Hayden, on the lines described above. This would of course need to be done in the strictest possible confidence as was the case when the previous Australian Administration was briefed.

I should be grateful to know whether the Prime Minister agrees with this proposal.

Yours ever

J E Holmes

(J E Holmes)
Private Secretary

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