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Prime Minister

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PRIME MINISTERA.J.C. $\frac{15}{4}$ HONG KONG

In your Private Secretary's letter of 28th March you asked for my further views on the meaning of the phrase "to identify such aggression" in the current directive to our Force Commander in Hong Kong and on whether it would be appropriate to provide more detailed guidance on how the garrison should resist a Chinese attack.

2. There is an important distinction between the narrow instructions to which your initial question relates and the possibility of providing more detailed guidance which would seek to cover every eventuality. We could not in advance anticipate all of the possibilities for Chinese attack and the political circumstances in which they might take place and lay down meaningful responses to them. In practice the standing-start invasion is a remote possibility (though one against which we must guard) and it is much more likely that the run up to a Chinese attack would have been preceded by a number of actions and signals by the Chinese on which the Governor would have sought our directions. The crucial point is to have excellent communications both with the Governor and with the Commander British Forces Hong Kong.

3. You will remember from my letter of 18th March that I was particularly concerned to discuss this and other aspects of the issue personally with our Commander - General Boorman - which I have



now done. As to the meaning of his instructions in the context of a physical attack in strength by the Chinese, General Boorman is quite clear that his initial task is to show up such a step for what it is - an act of unprovoked aggression. Visual and electronic intelligence would be used to identify the size and composition of the attacking force and its supporting arms, as well as the time and place of attack. Secondly, our forces would physically engage the enemy so as to check the scale and depth of assault. Such action would of course involve casualties - to both sides. It would be intended to confirm that we faced a sustained assault and not a maverick raid. All of this action would be designed to provide us here as a matter of urgency with convincing and factual evidence on which to base decisions and for use in the international arena.

4. I have also discussed with General Boorman the second aspect of the need for further military detailed guidance. He is, of course, rightly conscious of the limits to his ability to wage conventional battle with a force structured for internal security duties as well of the dangers of attempting to deal with external aggression and internal unrest at the same time. Nevertheless he is quite clear that his task is to deter any Chinese aggression by ensuring that China perceives that any assault, whilst it would be successful in the end, would meet determined resistance and would thus involve the use of force by the Chinese at a high profile. Should China accept this risk then his task would become that of resisting the aggression and of rapid reporting back to us in London. At this stage his aim, pending further direction, would be to hold out long enough to meet the likely political requirement to show that we had supported our rights and obligations and that the Chinese had acted forcibly and illegally. Resistance would continue for as long as possible or until the Governor as Commander-in-Chief ordered a halt.



5. As to whether further direction is desirable, I believe that the present directive meets the proper need for the Commander on the spot to have, under the Governor's direction, the authority to decide upon the precise action to be taken in response to aggression, while making it clear that it will be for the Government to issue at the time directions to the Commander-in-Chief and through him, to the Commander, which take account of the circumstances then prevailing.

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

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Ministry of Defence
14th April 1983

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

18 April 1983

Hong Kong

The Prime Minister has noted the contents of your Secretary of State's minute of 14 April in which Mr. Heseltine comments on the meaning of the phrase "to identify such aggression" in the current directive to our Force Commander in Hong Kong and states that the present directive contains sufficiently detailed guidance as to how the garrison should resist a Chinese attack.

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

Richard Mottram Esq
Ministry of Defence

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10 DOWNING STREET

B/C R. Jackling

From the Private Secretary

28 March, 1983

HONG KONG

The Prime Minister has read your Secretary of State's minute of 18 March and the enclosed paper on Chinese capabilities and options for military action against Hong Kong, as well as the possible British options.

The Prime Minister agrees with Mr. Heseltine that it would not be wise, at this time, to widen the circle of those involved in military contingency planning.

There is one aspect of the paper on which the Prime Minister would be grateful for your Secretary of State's further views. Paragraph 18 considers the contingency of a standing start invasion by the Chinese and states that the garrison would "fight in accordance with their current directive". That directive states, in paragraph 2(c), that the task of the garrison is "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". Mrs. Thatcher is inclined to question whether, particularly given that an invasion could take place at short notice, this is sufficiently precise guidance for the garrison. She would be grateful for a comment on the meaning of the phrase "to identify such aggression". She would also welcome your Secretary of State's advice on whether it would not be appropriate to provide more detailed guidance on how the garrison should resist a Chinese attack (Mrs. Thatcher has, of course, noted the guidance contained in the last three sentences of paragraph 18 of the paper).

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

A. J. COLES

R. Mottram, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence