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Prime Minister.

A. J. C. 27/12.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY

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FUTURE OF HONG KONG: DEFENCE AND INTERNAL SECURITY

Thank you for your minute of 15th December. I of course agree that we must firmly resist any suggestion that Chinese troops should be stationed in Hong Kong after 1997; and I am glad that Sir P Cradock is to take this up with the Chinese leaders during his farewell calls. But I think we need to be very cautious about any indication that we would be ready to withdraw our own garrison in advance of 1997 since we must remain responsible for Hong Kong's defence and security until then.

2. As you suggest, our officials are already well ahead with a joint paper on possible post-1997 defence and security arrangements for Hong Kong. I think these will inevitably involve the withdrawal of our own forces. If satisfactory alternative security arrangements for the future can be agreed with the Chinese, then it might well be sensible to use the interim period for a gradual reduction of our own garrison, as the new security force develops and becomes more effective. But I do not think we should even start to hint at this now. To do that would be to broach transitional arrangements before we had reached an understanding on what we were transitting to. This would not be consistent with how we are playing the wider negotiating hand.

3. Immediately, our first requirement is surely to clear our own minds on what sort of post-1997 arrangements we would like the Chinese to accept. I agree that a word on the way ahead could then, in the light of the paper, be useful.

4. I am sending a copy of this minute to the Prime Minister and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Ministry of Defence
19th December 1983