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INFO IMMEDIATE PEKING ROUTINE HONG KONG GOVERNMENT OFFICE LONDON  
FOR HONG KONG GOVT REPS BRUSSELS WASHINGTON NEW YORK GENEVA

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FUTURE OF HONG KONG: PRESS COVERAGE

SUMMARY

1. THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S PRESS CONFERENCE AND COMMENT ON IT COMPLETELY DOMINATED ALL SECTORS OF THE PRESS AS WELL AS TV AND RADIO NEWS. A NUMBER OF SPECIAL TV AND RADIO DISCUSSION PROGRAMMES WERE ORGANISED. THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S REMARK IN HIS OPENING STATEMENT TO THE EFFECT THAT BRITISH ADMINISTRATION AFTER 1997 WAS NOT A REALISTIC PROSPECT RECEIVED THE MOST ATTENTION. COMMENT BOTH IN EDITORIALS AND FROM THE LARGE NUMBER OF PUBLIC FIGURES WHO WERE INTERVIEWED, WAS GENERALLY FAVOURABLE, ALTHOUGH THERE WERE SOME GLOOMY EXCEPTIONS, NOTABLY THE RIGHT-WING AND PRO-TAIWAN PRESS.

DETAIL

(A) COVERAGE

2. MANY PAPERS INCLUDING BOTH MAJOR COMMUNIST PAPERS, CARRIED THE FULL TEXTS OF SECRETARY OF STATE'S STATEMENT AND THE TRANSCRIPT OF THE QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION. HEADLINES FOCUSED ON THE PASSAGE INDICATING THAT IT WAS NOT REALISTIC TO THINK IN TERMS OF BRITISH ADMINISTRATION AFTER 1997. MING PAO AND SING TAO DAILY (ALL INDEPENDENT) HIGHLIGHTED THE REMARKS ABOUT SEEKING ASSURANCES OF CONTINUITY: ORIENTAL DAILY (INDEPENDENT) SAID IN ITS HEADLINE THAT THE TALKS WERE AIMING FOR AN AGREEMENT ENSHRINING THE PRINCIPLE OF HONG KONG PEOPLE TO RUN HONG KONG. THE MAJOR COMMUNIST NEWSPAPER HEADLINES READ QUOTE SIR GEOFFREY INDICATES THAT BRITAIN DOES NOT INSIST ON SOVEREIGNTY: AN AGREEMENT WILL PRESERVE EXISTING SYSTEMS IN HONG KONG UNQUOTE. (WEN WEI PO) AND QUOTE BRITISH FOREIGN SECRETARY FORMALLY ANNOUNCES THAT BRITAIN WILL NO LONGER CONTROL HONG KONG AFTER 1997 UNQUOTE. MORE PESSIMISTIC NOTES WERE STRUCK BY THE SING PAO (INDEPENDENT) QUOTE BRITAIN ABANDONS HONG KONG UNQUOTE AND BY THE RIGHT WING AND PRO-TAIWAN PRESS. THE KUNG SHEUNG DAILY SAID THAT BRITAIN WAS ABANDONING SOVEREIGNTY WITH NO GUARANTEE THAT THINGS WOULD REMAIN THE SAME FOR 50 YEARS. THE NEW CHINA NEWS AGENCY PUT OUT A DESPATCH IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE SERVICE QUOTING WITHOUT COMMENT EXTENSIVE EXTRACTS FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S STATEMENT. THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND A NUMBER OF INDEPENDENT PAPERS NOTED THE APPEARANCE OF THE NCNA DESPATCH.

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### COMMENT

3. 14 PAPERS COMMENTED ON THE PRESS CONFERENCE. THERE WAS NO(NO) EDITORIAL COMMENT IN EITHER OF THE MAJOR COMMUNIST PAPERS. THE MING PAO (INDEPENDENT) SAID THAT THE SECRETARY OF STATE HAD MADE THE GREATEST POSSIBLE DISCLOSURE WITHOUT VIOLATING THE PRINCIPLE OF CONFIDENTIALITY. THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT DID UNDERSTAND THE WISH OF LOCAL PEOPLE TO MAINTAIN HONG KONG'S EXISTING SYSTEMS. BRITAIN HAD STRIVED TO MAINTAIN BRITISH ADMINISTRATION AFTER 1997 BUT THIS HAD BEEN OPPOSED BY CHINA. THE SING PAO (INDEPENDENT) SAID THAT THE DIE WAS CAST IN THE FORM OF A HIGH DEGREE OF AUTONOMY UNDER CHINESE SOVEREIGNTY, BUT THE DETAILS WERE STILL SHROUDED IN FOG. AUTONOMY WAS SUBJECT TO DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS BY BRITAIN AND BY CHINA. THE HONG KONG DAILY NEWS (INDEPENDENT) WELCOMED THE FACT THAT, AS A RESULT OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE, HONG KONG'S FUTURE WAS NOW CLEARER. THIS WOULD HELP REDUCE SPECULATION ON THE STOCK MARKETS. PEOPLE SHOULD NOT WORRY THAT AN AGREEMENT SIGNED BY BRITAIN AND CHINA WOULD BE CHANGED. THE FINANCIAL DAILY (INDEPENDENT) DOUBTED WHETHER BRITAIN COULD SECURE A TRULY BINDING INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT BECAUSE THIS WOULD CONFLICT WITH CHINA'S PLAN TO DRAW UP A BASIC LAW FOR HONG KONG AS A SPECIAL ADMINISTRATIVE REGION OF CHINA. THE REMAINING WORK WAS AN ENORMOUS CHALLENGE TO BOTH SIDES AND WOULD REQUIRE WISDOM AND MUCH DIPLOMATIC MANOEUVRING.

4. THE EXPRESS (RIGHT WING) SAID THAT NO MATTER HOW OPTIMISTIC THE SECRETARY OF STATE HAD BEEN, THE DIE WAS NOW CAST ON SOVEREIGNTY AND ADMINISTRATION. HONG KONG PEOPLE WOULD NO LONGER REGARD THE BRITISH AS BEING ON THEIR SIDE, AND THE MUTUAL TRUST BETWEEN LOCAL PEOPLE AND THE HONG KONG GOVERNMENT WOULD DISAPPEAR. THE REACTIONS OF THE CIVIL SERVICE AND THE DISCIPLINED SERVICES IN PARTICULAR WOULD BE VERY IMPORTANT: THERE WAS A DANGER THAT HONG KONG WOULD BECOME DIFFICULT TO GOVERN. THE PRO-TAIWAN HONG KONG TIMES SAID THE HONG KONG PEOPLE WERE DISAPPOINTED BY BRITAIN'S WEAK POSITION. THE PEKING GOVERNMENT, THROUGH THEIR PRESSURE TACTICS, HAD GAINED A GREAT DEAL AND GIVEN ONLY EMPTY PROMISES.

5. THREE MINOR LEFT-WING PAPERS COMMENTED EDITORIALY. THE CHING PO SAID THAT THE SECRETARY OF STATE HAD IN EFFECT CONFIRMED THE SERIES OF POLICIES ADOPTED BY CHINA IN RESOLVING THE HONG KONG QUESTION. MOST PEOPLE WANTED TO SEE CHINA RECOVER SOVEREIGNTY AND ADMINISTRATIVE RIGHTS OVER HONG KONG IN 1997. BRITAIN SHOULD TAKE PRACTICAL STEPS TO MAINTAIN HONG KONG'S STABILITY AND PROSPERITY AND MUST NOT ALLOW ANY UNREST TO DEVELOP. THE CENTRE DAILY SAID THAT BROAD PRINCIPLES HAD NOW BEEN SETTLED SINCE BRITAIN HAD CLEARLY INDICATED ITS DECISION TO GIVE UP SOVEREIGNTY AND ADMINISTRATION. IT SHOULD THEREFORE BE POSSIBLE TO CONCLUDE ON AN AGREEMENT BEFORE LONG. ANY DELAY WOULD BE HARMFUL. THE 'POINTS OF SUBSTANCE' WHICH SIR G. HOWE HAD SAID REMAINED TO BE CLEARED UP WERE NOT MATTERS OF BROAD PRINCIPLE. THE TALKS SHOULD THEREFORE BE SPEEDED UP. THE TIN TIN

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DAILY SAID THAT BRITAIN'S DECISION TO GIVE UP SOVEREIGNTY AND ADMINISTRATION WAS WISE AND COOL HEADED. WITH THIS MAJOR QUESTION SETTLED, HONG KONG COMPATRIOTS SHOULD JOIN HANDS WITH CHINA TO WORK FOR HONG KONG'S GREATER PROSPERITY. THE TA KUNG PAO (COMMUNIST) CARRIED A NEWS ANALYSIS COLUMN, WHICH OBSERVED THAT THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S REMARKS ON SOVEREIGNTY AND ADMINISTRATION HAD ATTRACTED MUCH ATTENTION. IT ALSO NOTED THAT THE SECRETARY OF STATE WAS QUOTE BASICALLY OPPOSED TO UNQUOTE A REFERENDUM.

6. THE WEN WEI PO CARRIED A DETAILED ACCOUNT OF A MEETING BETWEEN LOCAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND XU JIATUN, DIRECTOR OF NCNA, HONG KONG. XU WAS QUOTED AS HAVING SAID THAT THERE WERE TWO ASPECTS OF THE HONG KONG FUTURE ISSUE: THE REUMIFICATION OF CHINA AND THE MANNER IN WHICH HONG KONG WAS TO BE ADMINISTERED AFTER 1997. THE FIRST WAS A SUBJECT FOR THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH BRITAIN. THE SECOND WAS A CHINESE INTERNAL AFFAIR. CHINA HAD ALREADY NOTIFIED BRITAIN OF ITS POLICIES IN THIS RESPECT.

7. A WIDE RANGE OF PUBLIC FIGURES WERE INTERVIEWED BY THE PRESS, RADIO AND TELEVISION. UNOFFICIAL LEGCO MEMBERS ALLAN LEE, STEPHEN CHEONG, SELINA CHOW, PAULINE NG AND DR HU KAM-FAI, SIR PETER BLAKER (CHAIRMAN OF THE ANGLO/HONG KONG PARLIAMENTARY GROUP), MR JIMMY MACGREGOR/HONG KONG GENERAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE), SPOKESMEN FOR MEETING POINT, THE OBSERVERS AND THE HONG KONG BELONGERS PRESSURE GROUPS AS WELL AS A NUMBER OF ACADEMICS ALL WELCOMED THE REMOVAL OF UNCERTAINTY AND SUGGESTED THAT THE STATEMENT GAVE HONG KONG PEOPLE A BASIS ON WHICH THEY COULD WORK TO HELP SAFEGUARD THEIR OWN FUTURE. MR MACGREGOR DID NOT (NOT) THINK THAT THE STOCK MARKETS WOULD REACT STRONGLY WHEN THEY REOPENED AFTER THE HOLIDAY. THE OBSERVERS SPOKESMAN ADDED THAT A CLEARER INDICATION OF HOW THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT INTENDED TO PROMOTE REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT IN HONG KONG WOULD HAVE BEEN WELCOME.

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8. TWO DISTRICT BOARD MEMBERS WERE QUOTED AS SAYING THAT THE STATEMENT HAD NOT REVEALED ENOUGH TO SATISFY HONG KONG PEOPLE. THE REMAINDER WORRIED BECAUSE THE TWO SIDES WERE SOME WAY FROM AN AGREEMENT. LAU CHIN SHEK (LABOUR MOVEMENT ACTIVIST) SAID THAT THE STATEMENT WAS DISAPPOINTING BECAUSE IT HAD FAILED TO INDICATE CLEARLY HOW HONG KONG PEOPLE WERE TO BE PROPERLY CONSULTED. A NUMBER OF COMMENTATORS SAID THAT THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S STATEMENT CONTAINED NOTHING NEW. BUT THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT THESE THINGS HAD BEEN SAID BY THE BRITISH.

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