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Ref. A01228

PRIME MINISTER

Armed Protection for British Government Representatives Overseas
(OD(80) 2)

BACKGROUND

This paper by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary deals with the problem of protecting British diplomats overseas where the host Governments cannot be trusted to discharge this responsibility properly. The problem has been the subject of an official working party who did not reach agreement whether armed protection should be in future provided by the Armed Services, the police, a special Foreign and Commonwealth Office bodyguard unit created for the purpose or by hiring as at present.

2. Local hire is illegal in some countries (including the United Kingdom) and unreliable in others. There is only one suitable British firm who can provide guards for overseas Embassies - KMS Ltd. So far their services have been satisfactory, but the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary is concerned about the wisdom and propriety of continuing to rely on one small private firm. The Home Secretary is opposed to using our own police and the Secretary of State for Defence to using our own servicemen, in both cases on the grounds that this is not the right kind of job on which to employ such personnel and that to do so would create considerable problems of administration. The Home Secretary has been advocating the creation of a special FCO bodyguard unit as the best solution. The Minister of State at the Civil Service Department has said that he is opposed to this on the grounds that this would be the most expensive option and that it would also increase the number of civil servants.

3. I am not convinced that a special FCO unit need be the most expensive option; and I doubt whether the fact that it would create a handful of extra civil servants should be regarded as an overriding objection. If continued reliance on KMS is not acceptable - I do not really understand why it should be - a special FCO unit is probably the best solution; certainly better than using regular policemen or soldiers.

HANDLING

4. You may care to invite the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to introduce his paper. If he does not deal with the point in his introduction, you may then care to ask him about the grounds for the doubts in principle about the "wisdom and propriety" of continuing to rely on KMS Ltd. According to Annex A of the report they only provide guards in four overseas locations, which must be within the compass of even a small security firm, and the background of many of their staff is exactly the kind of background one might expect of men who volunteer to join a special Foreign and Commonwealth Office bodyguard unit. In the ensuing discussion, you will wish to cover the following points:-

- (a) Why are the Services unwilling to take on this small task? United States Embassies all over the world are guarded by United States Marines. The Secretary of State for Defence will probably argue that the Royal Military Police who are the most appropriate for this kind of task, are already fully stretched and in any case this kind of static guard duty would be a waste of their wide training.
- (b) Why should not the police do it? The Home Secretary is also likely to argue that this is not a proper task for the domestic police.
- (c) What are the arguments for a Foreign and Commonwealth Office bodyguard unit? Unless the Foreign and Commonwealth Office intends to give up hiring armed guards locally, it looks as if the requirement for United Kingdom based guards will only amount to about 12 people. Is it really worth setting up a new unit for this task? Conversely, if no other solution seems acceptable, can the small financial and manpower costs involved be regarded as decisive against this course?

CONCLUSION

5. This is not really a problem which should need to come to OD. You will wish to gauge from the discussion how strongly the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary wants to change the present arrangement and what the arguments are for alternatives. If a clear picture does not emerge fairly quickly, the best



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course might be to invite the Home Secretary to discuss the problem further with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Secretary of State for Defence and the Minister of State, Civil Service Department, and either to dispose of it without troubling OD further, or alternatively to report back to the Sub-Committee of OD which, under your chairmanship, deals with problems of terrorism (OD(T)).

RA

(Robert Armstrong)

25th January, 1980



with compliments

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18 January 1980

The Rt Hon The Lord Carrington, KCMG, MC
Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary
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La. V. Hunt

Dear Foreign Commonwealth Secretary

ARMED PROTECTION FOR BRITISH GOVERNMENT
REPRESENTATIVES OVERSEAS

One of the options identified by officials in the note attached to your paper OD(80)2 as a possible solution to this problem is the formation of a specialist group of permanent staff. As you say in your paper, this would involve the recruitment of a new special group of civil servants.

From the comments in the note by officials, and in your covering paper, it seems that this option was included mainly for the sake of completeness, and is not one which you yourself would favour as a solution.

This would certainly be by own feeling. You have mentioned some of the disadvantages in your paper. Apart from these, it seems that an FCO Armed Unit would be the most expensive option. Also it would of course run counter to our efforts to reduce the size of the Civil Service.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister as Chairman of OD, to other OD members, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours sincerely

Paul Channon

P.P. PAUL CHANNON

*(Approved by the Minister of State
and signed in his absence -)*

13 JAN 1950

