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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1

Telephone 01-~~3307822~~ 218 2111/3

MO 21/23

13th August 1980

Dear Mike,

THE PROTECTION OF GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES
OVERSEAS

Thank you for your letter of 6th August about the provision of bodyguards for Government representatives overseas.

The Defence Secretary has noted the Prime Minister's comment about providing funds for bodyguards by withdrawing some of the considerable number of military personnel who are still based with our Embassies overseas. As the Defence Secretary explained in his letter of 28th July, the problem is not primarily one of finance (either for MOD in respect of training or, we assume, for the FCO in respect of the actual costs of the operation) but whether it is reasonable to put this additional task on a heavily overstretched and undermanned unit particularly since this is a task more suited to the police than the military.

As far as our uniformed Attaches abroad are concerned, to whom we assume the Prime Minister was referring, they of course have an important role to play in, amongst other things, providing military intelligence and support for our Defence Sales effort overseas. At 1 April this year there were 151 such Attaches which is hardly a considerable number relative to the scale of our overseas representation as a whole, particularly given the importance attached to intelligence and Defence Sales. Numbers dropped by 12% in the 5 years to 1 April 1979 and by a further 2% in the last year (a total of 24 posts).

M A Pattison Esq

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The Defence Secretary has also seen the Chancellor of the Exchequer's letter of 12th August recalling the previous Government's 25% target reduction in Service Attaches and their staffs, for which it was agreed that the baseline should be 1 April 1974. The change of Government in May 1979 occurred before a final report and plan of implementation was approved. The Defence Secretary has however renewed the drive for economies in this area and has approved savings which effect a total reduction of some 20% in defence staff at overseas Missions since the beginning of the Defence Review period (this saving included the Attaches referred to in paragraph 3). In view of the overriding need for manpower economy the Defence Secretary has also set work in hand to secure further savings both in the defence staff at our largest Embassies, in parallel with the FCO cuts at these locations, and elsewhere.

I am sending copies of this letter to Paul Lever (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Martin Hall (HM Treasury) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever,
David Omand

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