



Prime Minister

Judy Clerk
14/4/83

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PRIME MINISTER

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 [Signature] [Initials]

ZIMBABWE: BRITISH MILITARY ADVISORY AND TRAINING TEAM

You will recall that you agreed last November that the size of the British Military Advisory and Training Team (BMATT) in Zimbabwe could be increased slightly to enable a training programme for Zimbabwe National Army instructors to be completed by June of this year. This programme has been proceeding well since then and is to schedule; but we have now had to consider whether BMATT should continue beyond June and if so with what role. The decision has to be taken against the background of the recent disturbing events in Matabeleland and the sharp deterioration in relations between ZANU and ZAPU.

2. I attach a joint paper by MOD and FCO officials which sets out the case for and against maintaining our presence and outlines a proposed revised task for the team which would enable BMATT's stabilising influence to continue whilst at the same time significantly reducing the number of personnel involved. The Chiefs of Staff consider that the risk to the individuals involved in the team will continue to be low and that the proposed arrangements will enable BMATT to avoid becoming associated with potentially embarrassing operational activities.

3. I recommend that we should maintain BMATT at a reduced level after June on the basis proposed; but that we should review the role of BMATT again at the end of this year and should not at this stage enter into a commitment to complete the current task in its entirety, which would involve the team remaining until 1985.

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4. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary is I understand content to proceed on this basis.
5. I am copying this minute to the other members of OD and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

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Ministry of Defence
14th April 1983

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ZIMBABWE: THE FUTURE OF THE BRITISH MILITARY ADVISORY AND TRAINING TEAM

A Paper by MOD and FCO Officials

Introduction

1. The British Military Advisory and Training Team (BMATT) has been in Zimbabwe since independence. In November 1981 it successfully completed its initial task of amalgamating the previously warring factions. Its task since then has been to establish a basic training framework. With a current strength of around 100 its present main role is to run a concentrated training programme at Inkomo Camp (near Harare) for Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) instructors. Although this particular task will be completed in June, Mr Mugabe expects BMATT to continue to assist in other ways beyond that date. We need to decide soon whether BMATT should remain and if so the tasks it should perform.

Discussion

2. The decision has to be taken against the background of a sharp deterioration in the political and security situation. The Zimbabwe Government are engaged on a deliberate policy of military repression and political confrontation. The worst of the army excesses in Matabeleland (which went beyond Government orders) appear to be over but there could be a dangerous dissident/Ndebele backlash. The plan to demobilise large numbers of ex-ZIPRA elements has been shelved at least temporarily but army cohesion is under some strain. Government measures have had only limited success in improving security within Matabeleland.

3. Public and Parliamentary opinion may become concerned that we should appear to be publicly supporting repressive policies and army excesses. The North Koreans have become guilty by association; if British trained units became involved in atrocities (they have not so far) we might become so also. Should the downward slide continue, the identification with failure would be compounded by the continued presence of BMATT. Similar risks

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would apply in the event of any Zimbabwean action in Botswana.

4. On the other hand, outside Matabeleland, the country remains calm. Many of the Ndebele and ZAPU are cowed; the ZAPU elements in the army and Government remain loyal; there has been no serious factional fighting in the army for several months. The situation is not irretrievable. Essentially, the arguments for a continued BMATT presence remain valid, and have to some extent been reinforced by recent events. In sum:

- (i) BMATT has been a successful force for discipline and cohesion in the army and thus for stability in the country: its withdrawal at this stage would further undermine the fragile unity of the amalgamated army;
- (ii) BMATT is important for the white community: its withdrawal in present circumstances would have a serious effect on their already shaky confidence;
- (iii) BMATT is an important means of encouraging Mugabe's pro-Western and anti-Soviet stance: a withdrawal now would confirm his recent doubts about our reliability as a partner and stimulate him to look elsewhere (the Soviet Union has recently for the first time sent a consignment of arms). The effect would be all the greater since Mr Mugabe is expecting BMATT to continue an effective level of support for the ZNA.
- (iv) The reputation of BMATT spreads far wider than Zimbabwe: its precipitous withdrawal would make us seem a 'fair weather friend' in Black Africa;
- (v) Through his access to Ministers and military commanders, Commander BMATT has been able to exert a steadying influence in the development of military policy, and in some cases the conduct of military operations.

His regular contact with Mugabe is of great benefit to HMG more generally;

(vi) BMATT's continued presence is strongly supported by the US.

5. Despite the risks involved, the balance of arguments seems to be strongly that BMATT should be maintained.

6. By June BMATT will have completed its training programme for ZNA instructors. If it is to remain, the Commander's judgement (shared by MOD and the FCO) is that its main task thereafter should be to ensure that the training methods and procedures taught at Inkomo are implemented throughout the ZNA. On that basis he has proposed the formation of training teams to visit each battalion in turn to supervise the newly trained instructors. Very recently, however, Army Commander Nhongo has asked, in addition, for assistance with a new task: the assessment of all officers (and possibly senior NCO's) as part of a review to reduce the size of the ZNA. This is a welcome request. Whilst we have long been urging that the ZNA is too large, we had been concerned at indications that demobilisation might have been implemented on factional lines. The involvement of BMATT in the selection process will serve to make it more likely that appointments to the permanent strength of the ZNA will be (and will be seen to be) made on merit alone. This advantage outweighs the possible risk that we might become associated with a factional demobilisation. Nhongo has asked that this assistance should then be followed by the provision of the supervisory training teams. He envisages a slightly different proposal from Commander BMATT's original plan in that Brigades would be visited in turn (rather than having BMATT teams based on all Brigades at once) and would be withdrawn from any operational commitment during the period of training. From our viewpoint this would be preferable. We would maintain BMATT's wider influence whilst at the same time reducing the risk of association with any operational activity. This whole process, which represents a logical continuation of the training that has been carried out to date, should be concluded by approximately

April 1985. At this stage, however, we could undertake no commitment to complete it in its entirety.

7. Precise details have still to be formulated but Nhongo's proposal could probably be carried out with a strength of around 50-60 men, about half the present number. This figure would include the continuation of both the training at the Zimbabwe Staff College and the general advice on training, pay and logistics matters. The risk to personal security would continue to be low.

8. One problem which would need to be faced, however, is whether BMATT should eventually be deployed to the Fifth Brigade. On the one hand it is the brigade which needs most attention and it would be in Zimbabwe's (and our) long term interest if it were possible for BMATT to improve its control and discipline. The deployment of a training team might moreover increase our influence and leverage on its style of operation. On the other hand there would be obvious political risks. While there would seem to be no objection to continuing to accept individuals from Fifth Brigade on centralised courses, a decision on deployment should be delayed until the security and political situation becomes clearer.

9. The cost of maintaining BMATT, taking account of the present commitment until June is estimated at about £2.5M in FY 1983/4 and provision has been made under UKMTAS for this amount. We expect the Zimbabwe Government to repeat a contribution of around £500,000.

Recommendation

10. In the light of these considerations we recommend that BMATT should continue in Zimbabwe beyond June 1983 at a strength of around 50-60 men with the aim of assisting ZNA demobilisation and ensuring that its training methods are implemented throughout the ZNA. A decision on the deployment of a training team for the Fifth Brigade should be taken later. The future of BMATT should in any event be reviewed again towards the end of 1983.



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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

15 April 1983

Dear Richard,

Zimbabwe: British Military Advisory and
Training Team

The Prime Minister has seen your Secretary of State's minute of 14 April containing recommendations, with which the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary agrees, on the future of BMATT.

Subject to the views of OD colleagues, the Prime Minister agrees that BMATT should continue in Zimbabwe beyond June 1983 at a strength of around 50-60 men with the aim of assisting the demobilisation of the Zimbabwe National Army and ensuring that its training methods are implemented throughout the ZNA. She further agrees that the future of BMATT should be reviewed again at the end of this year and that we should not at this stage enter into a commitment to complete the current task in its entirety.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to other members of OD and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours ever

John Gole

Richard Mottram Esq
Ministry of Defence.

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

15 April 1983

Dear Roger,

Zimbabwe: British Military Advisory and
Training Team

I regret that my letter of today's date about this subject was wrongly addressed to you. It should have been addressed to Richard Mottram. I am circulating a correctly addressed version and will be grateful if you and all the other recipients of this correspondence would substitute it for the earlier one.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to other members of OD and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

*Yours ever
John Wals*

Roger Bone Esq
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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CDL ✓
TRADE ✓
LPS ✓
MOD ✓
LPO ✓
HMT ✓
LCO ✓
HO ✓

VC
cc Mr Jankling
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Roger Bone, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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