



PM/84/125

PRIME MINISTERThe Security of Small States

1. At last November's Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) you were instrumental in persuading your colleagues to commission a study into the security problems of small states. By defusing the sharp differences of opinion within the Commonwealth which had been caused by Grenada, the agreement to launch this study met a pressing political need at the time. But it also marked a recognition that crises in very small states can have far reaching implications, not only for the stability of the region concerned but also for wider Western interests.

2. The Commonwealth study is still at an early stage and will not be completed until next year's CHOGM in the Bahamas. The best outcome from HMG's point of view would be agreement on some guidelines on which a coherent Western and Commonwealth approach could be based and as a result of which countries like Canada, Australia and New Zealand assumed greater responsibility. Insofar as is possible I shall steer the study in this direction, and have already provided the Secretary General with a paper analysing the nature of the problem and suggesting ways in which it might be tackled. Sir Anthony Parsons' agreement to serve on the Secretary General's consultative group will help. In the meantime, we need our own policy. As a basis for discussion in OD, this minute sets out my views on the broad outlines of our general approach and makes certain recommendations for action especially in relation to small Caribbean states.

The Problem

3. HMG is of course responsible for the defence and security
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Prime Minister

Relevant to your talk with Sir A. Parsons tomorrow.

Agree to OD discussion?

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of our remaining dependencies. Our determination to carry out these responsibilities was well demonstrated over the Falkland Islands and no one need doubt our resolution on this score. The problem arises as little states - and our remaining dependencies are all small - come to independence, nominally sovereign, but effectively without the capacity to deter external threats or to cope successfully with determined efforts to subvert their government and way of life. With our allies and partners in the Commonwealth we need to develop policies which will increase the security and democratic values of existing independent small states and provide a more secure international environment for our remaining dependencies as they come to independence.

4. Where the United Kingdom - and our allies - have obvious strategic interests - the Gulf is an example - HMG already have some defence arrangements in place. In the context of small states, work undertaken in my Department has focussed on parts of the world where the UK's strategic interest is either less direct (such as the Caribbean or the Indian Ocean) or of little importance (such as in the South Pacific), but where a crisis can affect HMG's wider interests adversely, either because: first, the interests of our allies - especially the United States - are involved (which can have repercussions for the Alliance as a whole); or, because the UK can be held to have certain residual responsibilities; or both. Because of its importance to the United States, and because of our commitment to Belize, we shall need to be especially vigilant in the Caribbean and concentrate a major portion of our efforts there.

HMG's Policy

5. I do not believe that we should base our policy on the assumption that we would take pre-emptive military action to prevent aggression against or internal subversion of a small state. Our policy objectives therefore have to be:

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- (a) to prevent crises occurring rather than to intervene in the event or apply cures afterwards, and to do so primarily by helping small states to help themselves;
- (b) to promote the growth of cooperative arrangements on a regional basis which will create a sense of local solidarity and a climate of confidence;
- (c) gradually to diminish the extent of HMG's residual responsibilities and public expectations of us by sharing responsibility with allies and partners so that certain of them eg Australia and New Zealand in the South Pacific, Canada as well as the US in the Caribbean, and possibly some of our Western European friends in the Indian Ocean, assume more of a leading role.

Measures to Promote the Security of Small States

6. The more effective preventative measures are, the less are the chances of having to face the awkward choices with which Grenada confronted the Allies. There is a range of possible policy instruments available to HMG. Essentially these comprise:

British Diplomatic Presence

7. Maintenance of a diplomatic presence in small states is important. A British presence in itself acts as a stabilising element locally and is indispensable to being properly informed about local conditions. It also increases the effectiveness of our cooperation with friends and allies, especially the Americans. Broadly speaking I do not think present levels of representation in small states need to be increased, except in a very limited number of places, but they ought not to be reduced further.

Civilian Assistance

8. Most of the small states considered here already receive generous British aid if calculated in per capita terms. I do not consider that we should spend a higher proportion of our
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capital aid programme on them (although there are one or two instances where short-term increases would be justified in support of particularly important capital projects). But little states are frequently short of high quality civil servants because their own best people emigrate. I do believe therefore that technical assistance in the form of education and training of local personnel and the provision of skilled manpower can make a significant contribution to political stability and thus to internal security, and that we should be prepared to increase our effort in this area in response to need.

Security Assistance

9. The same applies to the training of armed and police forces. In 1983/4, we spent about £4 million on support for the armed and police forces of the small states in the Caribbean, South Pacific and Indian Ocean. There is a case for doing more, especially in the Caribbean. It is hard to overestimate the dividend in political stability to be obtained from the existence of honest, loyal and well-disciplined armed forces and civil police. I am therefore reviewing my own department's arrangements for such assistance with a view to determining whether the level and management of resources devoted to it is right.

Information Policy

10. Information and cultural policies are important tools in the preservation of democratic values. We also need to use them effectively to protect and promote British interests and gain support for HMG's policies. For a variety of reasons, not less the existence of a substantial West Indian population in the UK, this is especially relevant in the Caribbean. I think the BBC Caribbean service, cut a number of years ago, ought to be revived and I am reviewing our information effort overall in the Caribbean as well as the possible reopening of

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the British Council there. We must ensure that a good standard of English is maintained.

Security Guarantees

11. The most direct means of promoting the security of small states would be to offer them bilateral security guarantees. But against other much greater priorities, and given that our vital interests are not at stake, such a policy would not be justified for the UK. Nonetheless, the steps being taken to improve our out-of-area intervention capability increase our freedom of manoeuvre and our ability to cooperate out-of-area with our allies as well as raise the level of deterrence generally. And, as many small states are also islands, I attach importance to visits by Royal Navy ships. These are a highly visible demonstration of our continuing interest both to governments and populations, as well as to our allies - especially the Americans - and to our foes.

Multilateral Means of Promoting Security: Regional Cooperation

12. Historically most experiments with political federations between ex-colonies have not had happy endings. It seems doubtful that these little states are yet ready to resume ties that they earlier broke. A large number of small states are, however, evincing more interest in the benefits to be had from closer cooperation with neighbours. I think that the key to increasing the security of small states lies in encouraging them to cooperate still further. So far as our own support is concerned, I am exploring ways of increasing our assistance to the members of the Regional Security System in the East Caribbean. This would involve more military training and improving their ability to police coastal waters - not least against the drug traffic, which is a source of particular concern to the Americans. We should also encourage the Australians and New Zealanders to step up their support for

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the security of the South Pacific states.

The benefits of support for small states

13. The United States of course has the major responsibility for security in the Caribbean, and we are seeking to harmonise more effectively our own assistance to Caribbean states with that of the Americans. They recognise this and have made it clear that they are keen to ensure that their - very considerable - assistance is efficiently dovetailed with what we ourselves and allies like the Canadians are able to do in the area. This is a welcome development. I am convinced that a disposition on our part to be helpful to the Americans in the Caribbean (and Belize) will pay dividends in Anglo-American relations well beyond the costs. As we know the Americans feel, with some justice, that out of the area the Europeans leave too much to them. Without doubt this is one of the main causes of friction in transatlantic relations. In the Caribbean itself, a more active policy on our part will help convince public opinion locally as well as in this country that the security as well as the welfare of the area remains of concern to us.

14. The need to improve the security of the small states in the South Pacific and Indian Ocean is less urgent. But there is a common Western interest in the long term stability and pro-Western alignment of those areas. It is therefore right that we should encourage our Western partners to provide more security-related assistance and to promote greater regional cooperation there. As in the Caribbean, the climate of confidence created by cooperation on a regional basis in security matters will not only increase deterrence against outside threats but will also, along with other measures,

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help steady the nerve and the resolution of these small governments domestically. We must, of course, recognise that were it to come to an actual intervention to forestall a coup, even when undertaken by small friendly neighbours at the invitation of the threatened government, there will be controversy, a consideration which reinforces the importance of HMG pursuing a sufficiently active preventative policy.

The United Nations

15. The UN Secretary General has advocated a more pre-emptive UN role in the event of potential crises. Laudable as this may be, the likelihood of the UN making an effective contribution must be slight given that policy would first have to be agreed in the Security Council. In general, we should give such ideas a fair wind without laying any great store by them.

Resource Implications

16. If we want to pursue an effective preventative policy in relation to the issues raised by the existence of small states, expenditure is involved. The tools are all available and the extra sum involved need only be small. The measures I have identified so far relate to the Caribbean as the priority area. These would cost a total of £2.8 million in 1985/86, £1.9 million in 1986/87 and £1 million a year thereafter, most of which would be devoted to the increased support for members of the East Caribbean Regional Security System outlined in paragraph 12. A proportion of this expenditure I can absorb. I have made additional bids for the military training, BBC and British Council elements of my proposals in this year's PES round (totalling £1.8 million, £1.3 million and £0.8 million in the three PES years), since

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in order to find the resources elsewhere in my votes, sacrifices which I consider highly undesirable would have to be made. The Treasury have expressed the view that this is the sort of marginal adjustment of priorities which should be financed from within existing programmes. If you and our OD colleagues agree with what I propose on the policy side, the question of finance can be settled with the Chief Secretary in the PES discussions. I believe that such modest expenditure now could save us a great deal of money later on.

Recommendations

17. In view of the various points outlined above, I recommend that:

(a) we should actively participate in the Commonwealth study with the aim of ensuring that it establishes clear guidelines for a coherent approach to the security of small states and thereby encourages larger Commonwealth countries (notably Australia, New Zealand and Canada) to assume greater responsibility;

(b) we should ourselves pursue the policy outlined in this minute, which aims at prevention rather than cure, helping the small states to help themselves, promoting the growth of regional co-operation, and gradually diminishing HMG's residual global responsibilities in respect of them;

(c) we should be especially vigilant about the Caribbean given its importance to the United States and the serious side effects which crises in that region can have;

(d) We should agree that a number of different policy instruments should be exploited to this end, notably the provision of more technical and security related assistance, together with the maintenance of an adequate diplomatic presence and an effective information and cultural effort. These measures would involve the modest increase in expenditure outlined in paragraph 15;

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(e) we should ensure that other suitable allies and partners are closely involved in the welfare of small states and in particular we should take the initiative in approaching our major NATO allies, and Australia and New Zealand, on a bilateral basis with a view to agreeing a coordinated approach.

18. I am copying this minute to our OD colleagues and Sir Robert Armstrong.

(GEOFFREY HOWE)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
18 July 1984

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

20 July 1984

Dear Len,

THE SECURITY OF SMALL STATES

The Prime Minister has so far been able to consider only briefly the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's minute (PM/84/125) on the security of small states.

The Prime Minister thinks that the minute is a useful basis for a discussion in OD. I will be grateful if arrangements for this can be set in hand. I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to members of OD and to Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely

C.D. Powell

Len Appleyard, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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25 July 1984

Dear Charles

THE SECURITY OF SMALL STATES

The Chief Secretary ^{with CP?} has seen the Foreign Secretary's minute of 18 July and your note to Len Appleyard on 20 July.

Without wishing to pre-empt discussion of the Foreign Secretary's general policy proposals, he has noted that decisions on funding new initiatives in the Caribbean or elsewhere should await the Public Expenditure Survey where they can be weighed against other claims on resources both within the field of foreign affairs and elsewhere.

Copies of this go to the Private Secretaries to members of OD and to Richard Hatfield.

Yours sincerely

John Gieve

JOHN GIEVE
Private Secretary

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