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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

27 February 1990

Dear Charles,

British Military Government Berlin

You may wish to be aware of a proposal to change the name of the British Military Government in Berlin (BMG) to "British Mission Berlin".

The background to this is that the present title has become increasingly anachronistic and misleading. BMG is neither military nor a Government. The only military member of BMG is the Commandant. The rest of the staff are civilians. It does not govern Berlin; it exercises, with the French and Americans, the residual Allied rights in the city. It is clear that many Berliners find the present name offensive, however much they may support the Allied role more generally.

The Americans made a simple change of name back in the 1950s. We have been consulting the French on plans to follow suit. The Berlin Senat have now asked us to make the change. We understand that the French may announce their change when M. Dumas visits West Berlin on 1 March. We think we should announce a similar change at the same time - or just before.

We would not seek to attract any fanfare or publicity for our change. We would announce it in a low key, making it clear that we saw it as part of a process of modernising our role in the city. Further background is set out in the enclosed note.

I am copying this letter to Simon Webb (MOD).

Yours ever,

Richard Gozney

(R H T Gozney)
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq
10 Downing Street

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"BRITISH MILITARY GOVERNMENT" BERLIN: ITS NAME AND ITS HEAD

1. This paper is concerned with two matters: (A) replacing the name "British Military Government" with "British Mission, Berlin" and (B) the question who should hold the title of head of Mission. A major aim, in deciding both matters, is to describe existing arrangements and responsibilities as accurately as possible, without altering them.

(A) Change of Title

2. The title "British Military Government" ("BMG") for many years has not reflected the real functions of the organisation. It is, in fact, neither military nor a government. BMG's governmental functions are exiguous, following the handing over of the great majority of the Allies' powers and responsibilities to the Berlin civil authorities. The only military member of BMG is the Commandant. What BMG does is to exercise, with the French and the Americans in Berlin, and through contacts with the city authorities and with the Soviet Embassy in East Berlin, the residual Allied responsibilities in the city. These mainly concern the need to ensure that the city authorities conduct relations with the GDR and the FRG in ways compatible with the special status of Berlin; and also the way public order is maintained by the Berlin police.

3. Although there is little direct pressure for the title to be dropped, it is obviously anachronistic. Berliners are generally too polite to raise the matter (possibly more so than visitors from the Federal Republic) but there is undoubtedly an instinctive and virtually unanimous reaction by those who become aware of the continuing existence of Allied military governments that the term is offensive; it appears to lay unnecessary emphasis on limitations on German sovereignty and even carries a disagreeable flavour of martial law.

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4. A change of name is desirable in order to describe BMG more truly and to correct the anachronistic impression. Such a change would be in line with our policy of modernising the Allied role in Berlin without undermining the essential elements of our legal position. The Americans made the change to a Mission in the 1950s.

5. The change has appeared desirable for some time. The question has been when would be an appropriate time. This question of timing has now been precipitated by the opening of the Wall. The case for "modernising" the Allies' practices and arrangements in Berlin, so as not to look anachronistic, is greatly strengthened in the new situation. It is better to act before being subjected to public pressure.

6. We propose that the change should be brought about without fanfare. We would simply explain that the new title "British Mission, Berlin" better reflected the existing functions of the organisation and that no change would result in those functions or the substantive roles of the Commandant and the Minister.

(B) The Title of Head of the Mission

7. It is proposed that the Minister should be the Head of Mission, while remaining Deputy Commandant.

8. This arrangement would be a correct description of the present situation as it is in reality. The Minister, as has been recognised by successive FCO Inspections, is in day-to-day charge of BMG. He supervises the work of all the sections and is responsible for ensuring that BMG's objectives are carried out. He authorises the despatch of telegrams and personally drafts the Annual Review. He is also responsible for the personnel of BMG, including disciplinary matters, and BMG's administration, budget and account.

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9. The Commandant is the senior British authority in the British Sector and the senior British representative in the Allied Kommandatura, where the Minister, who is Deputy Commandant, is his Deputy.

10. These functions and relationships would not be affected by the change in BMG's title or by the Minister being described as Head of the Mission as well as Deputy Commandant. The existing situation is anomalous, in that the Minister runs BMG but is not described as doing so; that anomaly would be removed.

11. The Minister would continue as now to consult the Commandant, and be consulted by him, on all matters of overlapping interest. The Commandant would continue to be kept informed of political developments by receiving copies of telegrams and despatches, by attendance by the Minister and his staff at the Commandant's twice-weekly "Prayers" and, most important of all, by frequent and ad hoc informal discussions. The two, with their staffs, would remain a military/diplomatic team, cooperating closely at all levels.

12. The purpose of the change therefore would be to remove cosmetic anomalies in the present situation, taking advantage of the opportunity presented by the change in BMG's title, without altering the weight of the Commandant's and Minister's jobs. Relations between the present incumbents of the two jobs are excellent but in the past have not always worked well, due to the possibilities for friction inherent in the apparent subordination of one officer to another of equal rank. The new arrangements should minimise the risk of friction in future by introducing greater clarity in the descriptions of the role of the Minister while preserving overall supremacy of the Commandant.

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13. We propose that Section II of the Commandant's Directive from the Commanders-in-Chief and the Ambassador, dealing with his Civil Responsibilities, should be amended along the lines of the attached draft. The amendments are designed to reflect the change of name of BMG and the new role of the Minister and by spelling out much more clearly than before the obligation of the Minister to consult the Commandant closely. The Minister would for the first time receive a parallel instruction from the Ambassador covering his obligations. These changes should contribute to the aim of minimising the risk of friction between future incumbents of the two jobs.

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From the Private Secretary

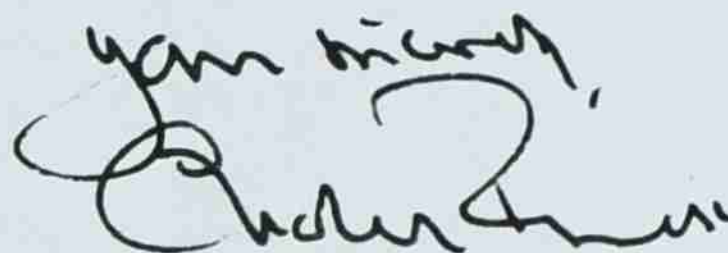
28 February 1990

Dear Richard.

BRITISH MILITARY GOVERNMENT, BERLIN

Thank you for your letter of 27 February about the proposed change in title of the British Military Government Berlin to British Mission Berlin. The Prime Minister is content with this.

I am copying this letter to Simon Webb (Ministry of Defence).

Yours sincerely,

(C. D. POWELL)

Richard Gozney, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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