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cc: Master Set of Records

Hong Kong

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

15 June 1979

BF 19.6.79

Dear Roger,

Reinforcement of Hong Kong

The Governor of Hong Kong, Sir Murray MacLehose, called on the Prime Minister at her room in the House of Commons on 14 June at 1800. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary was present.

Sir Murray MacLehose told the Prime Minister that Hong Kong's greatest problem was the continuing influx of Chinese from mainland China. The Hong Kong garrison were patrolling the border day and night and one battalion had picked up 7,000 illegal immigrants in a month. Sir Murray said that he thought that this phenomenon had been caused by the temporary breakdown of internal authority in the People's Republic of China, as a result of too rapid measures of liberalisation. The mobs which had drifted into the major towns and cities were refusing to return to their farms and communes. Moreover, the Chinese army which had been stationed near the border with Hong Kong had been moved to the Vietnamese border at the time of the hostilities there and this had increased the local loss of control. This army was returning to its original station but was in poor shape and would not be fully effective until the end of the year. In the meantime, the Hong Kong garrison had to stem the flood and every available soldier was now deployed on this task.

Sir Murray told the Prime Minister that he thought that the Chinese leadership was sensitive to the efflux of the population and that, unless the Hong Kong authorities adopted an obviously relaxed attitude towards it, they would seek to reimpose control as soon as possible. But by September, the Hong Kong garrison would be exhausted and replacements would be essential. On the other hand, if the garrison could be reinforced immediately by one battalion and a half, this would enable the enlarged garrison to maintain maximum effort for 12 months. At the end of that time, the situation should be under control. Sir Murray said that his request to the British Government, therefore, was for the despatch of a battalion and a half of troops to Hong Kong to stay there for one year. Lord Carrington told the Prime Minister that he was very conscious of the difficulties which this request posed for the Secretary of State for Defence. He nevertheless considered it imperative on political grounds that Hong Kong should be given the reinforcement for which the Governor had asked.

/The Prime Minister

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The Prime Minister had seen, before her meeting with Sir Murray MacLehose, a copy of the Defence Secretary's minute (MO 5/14) of 12 June to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary about the difficulties and implications of reinforcement. She had also been informed by your office of Mr. Pym's conversation with Sir Murray MacLehose earlier in the afternoon. In the light of her own discussion with the Governor, however, the Prime Minister has asked me to say (as I told John Gutteridge on the telephone last night) that she and Lord Carrington are confident that, after further consideration, Mr. Pym will conclude that the Governor of Hong Kong must have the additional battalion and a half for which the Governor had asked, for a 12 month period. I should be grateful if you would let me know as soon as possible whether, and if so how, the Defence Secretary will be able to meet the Governor's request.

I am sending copies of this letter to Stephen Wall (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Martin Vile (Cabinet Office) *and M. Hall (HMT)*

Yours sincerely,
Roger Facer

Roger Facer, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence.

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