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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

5 October 1982

Future of Hong Kong: public comment on Anglo/Chinese talks

I think it would be helpful to the Prime Minister to have advice soon on how Parliamentary Questions and enquiries from the media and others about the Anglo/Chinese talks should be handled. Given that we are bound to receive questions from the press soon, and that Parliament will be reassembling in the near future, we shall need:

- (a) to recommend to the Prime Minister a line to take in Parliament which is sustainable over a considerable period;
- (b) to make clear to the media in London, Peking and Hong Kong from the outset how we propose to handle the talks publicly.

On the Parliamentary aspect, the Prime Minister indicated at her meeting last Friday (my letter of 1 October) how she might handle Parliamentary questioning. But I think it would be helpful if further thought could be given to this, and if a clear line to take, together with supplementaries, could be provided in the near future.

As regards the handling of the media, FCO telegram No. 466 to Peking contains certain guidance, namely that, if publicity becomes essential, we should say that meetings in Peking to follow up Mrs. Thatcher's visit had begun and add an assurance that Hong Kong will participate in the series of meetings, and that the Hong Kong Government, led by the Governor, will be closely involved at all stages. Sir Percy Cradock will also be taking the line with the Chinese that the content of the talks should be secret, and that both sides should avoid statements likely to prejudice their success, though from time to time both sides might agree a short statement on progress. Government spokesmen both here and in our Posts will presumably have to stick to such statements and refuse to be drawn further (otherwise we may get into unnecessary exchanges with the Chinese with a consequent unsettling effect in Hong Kong.

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Given the Prime Minister's involvement in the Hong Kong question, it will be important that No. 10, the FCO, Peking and Hong Kong are entirely at one on the handling of the media. I should therefore be grateful if you could let me have as soon as possible a self-contained note which I can put to the Prime Minister and which, if Mrs. Thatcher approves it, can thereafter constitute the guidance for all concerned.

A. J. COLES

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