

SECRET

59

Prime Minister.

A.S.C. 15/12.

A.S.C. 19/12.

h-a.



FCS/83/267

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE

Future of Hong Kong: Defence and Internal Security

1. You will have noted from recent reports on our negotiations with China over the future of Hong Kong that questions directly relating to defence have been raised for the first time. At the last round of talks, on 7/8 December, the Head of the Chinese negotiating team implied that China planned to station a garrison of the People's Liberation Army in Hong Kong after 1997. I enclose Peking telegram number 1322, which gives the fullest available account of the words he used.

2. Our Ambassador in Peking, who is about to leave his post, has already proposed that in his farewell calls on Chinese leaders he should question this intention, pointing out the grave damage that this would do to confidence in Hong Kong. He has now also suggested in the enclosed telegram number 1330 that it would be helpful, in any discussion over the proposed PLA pressure in Hong Kong after 1997, if he could indicate that we were considering the possibility of withdrawing British troops from the territory well before 1997. The Governor has acknowledged that the issue would need to be considered, but he pointed out that his Executive Council would need to be consulted.

3. I understand that our officials already have in preparation a joint paper covering all aspects of Hong Kong's defence and internal security after 1997. On the question of a withdrawal before 1997 the main input will come from your side, and I think that in the light of the Ambassador's suggestion we need to address this issue with urgency. Once the joint paper has been submitted it may be helpful if we were to have a word together about the next steps. I do

/not

SECRET



not believe that we can get a decision on so complex a matter in time for the Ambassador to use in his farewell calls, but it will be an important consideration in the context of the review which we are preparing on the negotiations in general.

4. I am sending a copy of this minute to the Prime Minister.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'G. Howe', written in a cursive style.

GEOFFREY HOWE

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
15 December 1983