



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Prime Minister

London SW1A 2AH

The FCO have come round
in favour of a visit by the Duke of Edinburgh
^{but} ~~press~~ suggest that it should be explicitly in
his World Wildlife capacity and
confined to South China. Are you
content?

7 November 1983

Dear John,

— FERS

7.11.

Yes not

Royal Visits to China: The Duke of Edinburgh

Robin Butler's letter of 12 November 1982 to John Holmes recorded the Prime Minister's views that it would be better for Princess Margaret not to visit Peking in May this year and that we should not pursue for the time being the idea of a State Visit by The Queen in 1984 or visits by the Duke of Edinburgh or the Prince and Princess of Wales.

Early this year, because of a fresh Chinese approach, we had another look at the question of a May visit by Princess Margaret. Your letter of 28 January recorded the Prime Minister's agreement with the Foreign Secretary's recommendation that such a visit would still be inappropriate. After consultation with Kensington Palace we accordingly told the Chinese Embassy that Princess Margaret's other engagements obliged her to decline the Chinese Government's invitation.

Recently an earlier, very tentative proposal for a visit to China by the Duke of Edinburgh, in his capacity as President of the World Wildlife Fund International (WWF) has again arisen. WWF have been cooperating with the Chinese Environmental Protection Office on a project to conserve the giant panda in China, including the establishment of a Research Centre at the Panda Reserve at Wolong in Sichuan. Early in 1981 we learnt informally that the Chinese Government wished to invite the Duke to visit the Panda Reserve and Research Centre after its completion in 1983. We were told then that they deliberately wished the invitation to be to the Duke in his WWF capacity, rather than as a member of the Royal Family, both because the panda project is one major area of Chinese cooperation with WWF and because this would make it easier to handle the visit in China enabling protocol to be kept to the minimum.

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AWayland, 17 April 2014

If we approve, it would be possible for a WWF representative, who is visiting Peking from 21 November, to discuss arrangements with the Ambassador and the Chinese Government, with a view to a visit next spring.

/I attach



I attach a copy of Peking telegram number 1090 which sets out Sir P Cradock's view of the proposal. We share both his continuing reservations about Royal visits in general and his view that a working visit by the Duke to the south of China only would carry less risk of embarrassment over Hong Kong than the earlier proposal for a visit to Peking by Princess Margaret. The explanation the Ambassador suggests for not including Peking in the itinerary should be acceptable. The Chinese have only a hazy understanding of royal protocol matters and are likely to defer to our preferences, particularly as they wish to have a successful State Visit in due course.

We do not think that Hong Kong public opinion would be concerned about the kind of visit envisaged. It would be presented as a WWF working visit rather than a bilateral protocol one. The campaign to save the panda is of international appeal and probably beyond China's own resources; no one would wish to seem to hinder the WWF's efforts in this regard. Any criticism of the Duke's visit could be countered by these points. Furthermore, the media in Hong Kong are likely to interpret Chinese hospitality for the Duke as a sign of goodwill towards Britain.

We should also consider the effect on the Chinese of a rejection of their invitation, so soon after our rebuff of their invitation to Princess Margaret. They would almost certainly see this as a deliberate decision by HMG to keep down the temperature of UK/China relations. This would be an unfortunate signal at a time when we hope for movement in the Hong Kong talks and when the Chinese are themselves seeking to demonstrate their interest in a substantial long-term relationship (recent offshore oil exploration and development contracts are striking examples of this). From this point of view, giving the WWF proposal a green light could be a modest but useful confidence-building gesture.

The Foreign Secretary accordingly agrees in principle with this proposal. If the Prime Minister also agrees, we shall inform the Duke of Edinburgh's Private Secretary and subject to his views authorise the Ambassador to begin to discuss the practical arrangements with the World Wildlife Fund. We would keep a very close eye on detailed arrangements.

The question of possible embarrassment caused by our earlier recommendation against a visit by Princess Margaret, taken together with the present recommendation, is perhaps rather for the Palace to resolve. Princess Margaret is believed still to be interested in visiting China.

Yours ever,
 (P F Ricketts)
Private Secretary

Peter Ricketts

The advice at X/ sees
wise. Agree?

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

FCO

London SW1A 2AH

13.1



13 January 1984

Dear Robin,

Yes
no

Royal Visit to China: The Duke of Edinburgh

I wrote to John Coles on 7 November about the proposal for a visit by the Duke of Edinburgh, in spring 1984, to the Panda Reserve in Sichuan, China. Your reply of 8 November recorded the Prime Minister's approval to this visit on the basis that it should be made explicitly in the Duke of Edinburgh's capacity as President of the World Wildlife Fund, and that it should, if possible, be confined to the south of China and should not include Peking.

We have since learnt that a visit in Spring 1984 will not be possible, and that the Chinese now wish to propose a visit in September. We sought the views of Sir P Cradock before he left Peking, and he has advised that in view of the Chinese intention to announce their plans for the future of Hong Kong in September, whatever the outcome of the present negotiations, the situation then is likely to be tense. He has therefore recommended that a visit during that period should be avoided.

Passage deleted and closed under FOI Exemption.
CWayland. 17 April 2014

Yes
no

Yours ever,

Peter Ricketts

(P F Ricketts)
Private Secretary

F E R Butler Esq
10 Downing Street



Do re.

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

8 November 1983

Royal Visits to China : The Duke of Edinburgh

The Prime Minister is content with the proposal that the possibility of a visit by the Duke of Edinburgh to China next spring should be pursued on the basis set out in your letter of 7 November to John Coles, namely that the visit should be explicitly in his capacity as President of the World Wildlife Fund International and that it should, if possible, be a visit to the South of China only without including Peking. Please will you continue to keep me in touch with the progress of this proposal.

FRB

P.F. Ricketts, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.