

NIOM(80)2

NOTE OF A MEETING HELD IN THE NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE ON  
FRIDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 1980 AT 12.00PM

Present

Mr Marshall	Chairman
Mr Burns	NIO
Mr Moriarty	
Mr Buxton	
Mr Ledlie	
Mr Bridges	
Mr Blackwell	
Mr Bengier	
Mr Stephen	MOD
Mr Stephens	
Mr Farthing	
Col Sincock	
Col Wilson	
Capt Ramsey	
Mr Newington	FCO

Force Levels

Mr Stephen said that NIO would by now have received Mr Cousins' letter of 19 February proposing that the 8 Brigade roulement unit west of the Foyle should be withdrawn, leaving two resident battalions to cover the Brigade area. It was proposed that this reduction could be achieved by the middle of the year if the Scots Dragoon Guards, who were due to arrive in Northern Ireland between 7 and 10 July, were not despatched. The unit would need to be informed that it was not going to Northern Ireland by 25 March at the latest if it was not to begin its Northern Ireland training. This in turn would require ministerial approval by 21 March and official agreement on the line to put to Ministers would be necessary by 17 March.

Mr Burns said that he would be taking the lead in Belfast and would ensure that a reply was sent to MOD as soon as possible. It would be necessary to obtain a current threat assessment and to consult the RUC which would take about a week; he would then reconvene the Working Group on Force Levels, on which MOD were represented. MOD

E.R.

● would therefore have advance warning of any problems which might arise.

#### AREA REVIEWS

Mr Ledlie said that the review of the security situation in South Armagh was nearing completion. The original intention was to put the first draft to Sir Maurice Oldfield by 7 March but there had been indications that the procedure might need to be accelerated, in which case the report could be submitted by the end of next week. It was most important that both the Chief Constable and the GOC were given a chance to consider the paper and the Secretary of State would wish to consider what further action, if any, was called for before the paper was put to the Prime Minister and other Ministers. To summarise, he estimated that about two weeks would elapse between the date on which the report was first submitted and the date on which it emerged from Belfast in its final form. Once the South Armagh review had been completed, it was hoped that the three other area reviews, on Londonderry, East Tyrone and Belfast, could be completed rapidly; the aim was to produce the three reports in April, May and June respectively.

In response to the Chairman's question as to how these reviews would tie in with the GOC's review of forces, Mr Stephens said that there would need be no conflict. The GOC's review was taking place in two stages; the first stage covered South Armagh and should be available in mid-March while the general review ordered by CGS should be completed by the end of April. This general review was to be undertaken from the Army's point of view although account would be taken of the views of the RUC and NIO.

#### IRISH-NAMED REGIMENTS

The Chairman said that the position appeared satisfactory.

Mr Stephen confirmed that no decision on the TAOR for the unit had

yet been taken and that NIO would be consulted.

#### THE YELLOW CARD

Mr Farthing said that the draft was now with the Treasury Solicitor. The Law Officers were content and the draft had also been sent to the senior Crown Solicitor in Belfast. Mr Newington asked whether there were to be any changes in content. The Chairman replied that there were not; the aim was to make the card more readily understandable for soldiers. He then asked whether the RUC had been consulted. Mr Burns confirmed that the RUC were content; they had examined the issue both with regard to their own Force Orders and with regard to whether the legal position of soldiers using firearms would be altered.

#### HELICOPTER OVERFLIGHTS

The Chairman said that the arrangement should be operational as from the evening of 22 February; the issue of the air-safety net had been put to one side and it was hoped that an appropriate incident would soon arise to demonstrate the importance of the agreement.

#### THE TAIOSEACH'S SPEECH AT THE ARD FHEIS

Mr Newington said that he had just been presented with a copy of the speech by the Irish Embassy; no further comment had been made at this meeting. Our primary concern was the impact of the speech on the progress of the Conference and no appreciable impact had been made, although, naturally, there were parts of the speech with which we would not agree. Nothing would be gained, however, by pressing the issue as we had to recognise the Taoiseach's political imperatives; he had to appear "greener" than Mr Lynch without unduly antagonising the British, and he had succeeded in this task. Although a new sense of urgency seemed to have been injected into the topic, Mr Haughey had drawn back from this during debate in the Dail and had confirmed that he would not discuss Northern Ireland with the Prime Minister at the forthcoming EEC conference. It seemed that little would come of the proposed approach

to other members of the EEC and the United States. Mr Newington also said that he had a note to the Dublin Embassy in hand and that we had requested that Mr Lenihan should meet Lord Carrington during March. So far, no reply had been received to the Secretary of State's suggestion that he visit Dublin.

#### THE POLITICAL CONFERENCE

The Chairman said that the Conference had moved from procedural to substantive matters. The SDLP had initially declined to take part until the role of the minority (item 8) was discussed but had decided to take part when item 6 (the modus operandi of government) was reached. Each party was putting forward their ideas and progress had been slow. Alliance had proposed a system of committees with no Cabinet and discussions had taken 2½ days; the DUP made most of the running. The SDLP had proposed a variation on the 1974 scheme and discussion of this proposal had terminated on Monday (18 February). The conference would resume on Wednesday, 27 February and meet on six successive working days. The DUP proposals on item 6 would be discussed first followed by the other items; some of which had been partly covered during discussion of item 6.

The discussions outside the Conference had also begun. There had been two meetings with the SDLP, and Alliance had indicated that they would like to attend. The SDLP had discussed security, the first time that they had agreed to face to face discussions on this topic, and had developed their theory that consensus in government was essential before security could be improved. They had also made allegations of brutality and sectarian partiality against the RUC and the UDR. Mr Burns said that although the first meeting had progressed satisfactorily, the second had degenerated into negative comment on the past. The Chairman said that there was likely to be some disagreement at the next meeting as the SDLP had claimed that the Secretary of State had agreed with the points which they made on security; a fact which we would dispute. The meeting would concern the economy of Northern Ireland and the SDLP

had already published their paper on the subject.

Visit by PUS and Mr Hannigan to Dublin

Mr Newington said that he understood from PS/PUS that the visit had gone well with no surprises.

Date of next meeting

It was provisionally agreed that the date of the next meeting should be Friday, 21 March. This would be confirmed in due course.

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