

SECRET

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



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Michael Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street
London SW1

3 April 1980

Prime Minister

Paul

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for Paul

Dear Michael,

In Paul's box

The Secretary of State minuted the Prime Minister yesterday about the review of the security situation in South Armagh recently carried out by Sir Maurice Oldfield.

... The Secretary of State saw last night the enclosed copy (transcribed from a mufax) of a minute by Sir Maurice Oldfield about the situation in East Tyrone, which as you know remains a particularly difficult area from a security point of view, and is distinctively different from South Armagh.

The Secretary of State thought the Prime Minister might be interested to see Sir Maurice's minute and asked me to pass you a copy.

*Yours ever,
Roy Harrington*

R A HARRINGTON

P.S. I should add that we are taking up with N.O. the suggestion (paragraph 5) that there is a shortage of helicopters.

SECRET

E.R.

Transcribed from mufax.

EAST TYRONE AREA REVIEW

..... I attended with the Planning Staff a briefing session in Portadown last week. This was chaired by ACC South and by Commander 3 Brigade and attended in addition to visitors by some 15 officers from the security forces. In the morning we were given a presentation and in the afternoon I chaired a discussion of the presentation, taking as my theme "Are we Winning"?

2. The first point which was striking, particularly when compared with the first briefing I had on South Armagh, also in Portadown, some 5 months ago, was the remarkable unanimity of approach and appreciation between the Police and the Army. Not to use too strong words, it would have been well nigh impossible to have conducted such an exercise in such an atmosphere last year. It is fashionable to say this is largely a matter of personalities. I think this is only partly true. It arises from a new atmosphere of co-operation rather than competition and also equally important, a sense of direction in that the people on the ground see some progress. That this progress may be more in improving our own machinery than in tangible successes against terrorists in the area does not belittle its importance.

3. It was agreed that East Tyrone would not be an easy area to analyse and dissect. It is more complicated than South Armagh. The religious mix is more complex. The area suffers from terrorists who cross the border as well as native ones living in and having their bases there. It has a history of violence. The terrorists include many known and competent operators.

4. The intelligence picture is encouraging. We were all impressed by the extent to which both Army and particularly the Police had successfully covered the size and personalities of the terrorist organisations, both native and just across the border. Yet this picture presents its own problems - namely how to bring known murderers to book. We were told, for example, that the terrorists who had blown up the 4 Gunners near Dungannon had been identified by witnesses and their whereabouts were known. It was, however, impossible to get these witnesses to give evidence in court against the terrorists. While in this case the problem is one of overcoming intimidation, there are other cases which underline the importance which the Chief Constable has stressed on a number of occasions of getting evidence as well as intelligence.

5. So far as operational tactics are concerned, there appears to be complete agreement among the Security Forces that they should proceed on the lines recently developed throughout the Brigade area and particularly in South Armagh. This involves more flexibility both for Army and Police: the Army view their role

more as one of containment by overt troop activity whilst extensive use is made of specialist units both for surveillance and ambushes. There was a plea for more civilian vehicles to be used to transport, particularly the Army, on their patrols, and also, if they ever become available, for more generous allocation of helicopters. I understand that HQNI are optimistic about obtaining an increased number of civilian vehicles but, as you know, there is little chance of any more helicopters.

6. There is almost certainly greater scope for UDR operations in this area than we felt there was in South Armagh. We had a very spirited presentation on UDR capabilities from the CO 8 UDR who stressed that he felt that the UDR could and should be used more extensively in support of the RUC and to relieve pressure on regular units. We noted however that his Battalion is numerically the weakest in the UDR and it has suffered more casualties than any other Battalion. Nevertheless, I guess that when we come to write the report we shall propose a greater mix of the three forces than we thought was desirable in South Armagh.

7. The Security Forces emphasised the need for continued and close co-operation with the Garda. They felt that the present framework of co-operation was right but hoped that the Garda would continue to strengthen its forces in County Monaghan as the RUC was doing on our side of the border. Particular attention was given to the importance of extradition for terrorists on the run against whom evidence could be presented by both RUC and the Garda; location of "kitchens" where home-made explosives were prepared (though many of these were thought to be deeper in the south); co-ordination of quick reaction after an incident. There was very little discussion of border road closures largely because work has already been done and the procedures for such closures are understood and accepted.

8. Finally, are we winning? While recognising the difficulties and dangers of the area and of the continuous possibility of spectaculars and other incidents for which the terrorists have both personnel and equipment to hand or on call, there was a cautious optimism, particularly among the senior officers at the presentation. Some of these in the RUC had long service in the region and felt that there was a new hope born largely from more effective intelligence and operational arrangements between RUC and Army. One or two of the younger ones advocated strengthening the specialist units in the area and all paid particular attention to the need for concentration on disrupting terrorist organisations by sustained harassment and, hopefully, convictions.

SECRET

E.R.

9. Perhaps I can best summarise the feeling after this initial look at the area by saying that there is no euphoric claim to be winning in East Tyrone yet, but there is a sense of general confidence stemming from an agreement that we have a firm platform from which we can go forward.

SECURITY CO-ORDINATOR
2 April 1980

SECRET

1957

... because I can't read and I can't write
initial look at the year of 1957...
... to be written in that year...
... of general...
... a line...

1957

SECURITY...
2 April 1957