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CABINET
DEFENCE AND OVERSEA POLICY COMMITTEE

NORTHERN IRELAND : LAW AND ORDER

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

The Threat

The main threat continues to come from Republican terrorists, chiefly the Provisional IRA. There have been important shifts in the techniques, organisation and tactics employed by the PIRA over the past four years. Until the end of 1978 violence was diminishing from the high level of two years earlier. Substantial successes had been achieved by the Security Forces against the terrorists. This was due to a number of factors, many of which still apply: PIRA's continuing isolation from the Catholic community, their failure to show any results in securing their long term aims, the increasing effectiveness and acceptance of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and PIRA's hypersensitivity to Security Force penetration and operations. But the terrorists have done much to offset these problems. They have contracted their organisation and now operate in smaller units, generally well co-ordinated and with better internal security than before. They have developed their technical and operational expertise and are more professional than before. Their operations are more effective, and successful attacks on the Security Forces have increased. Recent statistics are not encouraging, and the information I receive about the operation of the terrorists is disquieting. The areas near the border have become of increasing relative importance because of the advantages which the terrorists can gain from the use of Republic territory.

2. The Irish National Liberation Army present a similar but numerically smaller threat than the PIRA. There is an uneasy relationship between the two organisations, varying between rivalry and a degree of local co-operation.
3. The risk of retaliation from the Loyalist paramilitaries varies with the Protestants' perception of the threat from PIRA and the effectiveness of the Security Forces. At present there are increased rumblings from the Loyalists, aggravated by statements from people like Paisley. The Loyalists, paramilitaries and politicians alike, are by no means united but the danger of their taking concerted action cannot be discounted; it is one which we shall have to watch very carefully this summer.

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Government Policy

4. In dealing with the terrorist threat I believe that it is right to continue with the present legal framework based on criminal law and procedures as far as practicable. Terrorists should be prosecuted through the criminal law (which itself calls for police expertise in the collection of evidence). There should be no return to special category status for terrorist prisoners, and no question of an amnesty.

5. The police should continue to have the primary responsibility, developing their effectiveness in the prevention and detection of all crime, and their acceptance by the community. But for the foreseeable future Army support will remain essential: we shall continue to rely on their special skills and distinctive military capability for the prevention of lethal acts of terrorism and to react to serious terrorist incidents, especially in areas where the uniformed RUC cannot operate freely.

6. In this way we shall consolidate the present disadvantages of PIRA (see paragraph 1) and prevent a deterioration in the present position, which is still much easier in many ways than earlier in the 1970s. Our aims will be twofold: to defeat terrorism and to extend policing by the RUC throughout the Province. These aims are not inconsistent: indeed, they reinforce each other.

7. But if we are to make further inroads into PIRA and eventually eliminate terrorism, we shall have to be more effective than we are at present. The PIRA have the resources and the skill to maintain the terrorist campaign, with some ups and downs, for some years. Their motivation will not necessarily be eroded even by substantial political progress, for their motivation is self-centred and quite distinct from the political needs of the minority community.

8. I am therefore giving special priority, within the broad policy framework in paragraphs 4 and 5, to making fresh progress in three major areas:

- (i) We badly need more information and intelligence about PIRA's activities, and particularly predictive intelligence which enables us to take action in advance. Given the more tight-knit structure of the Provisional IRA, intelligence penetration has become more difficult. More surveillance is also needed. A special study is being made of the resources and arrangements for collecting and exploiting intelligence. I have called for an interim report from the special study this month, giving preliminary conclusions. Some improvements have already been made in Belfast.
- (ii) A second major problem area is PIRA's use of the Irish Republic as a base from which to mount their attacks, and they take advantage of the ability to move rapidly from one jurisdiction to another. Our intelligence about PIRA attacks from the South is poor. Most of the arms and

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explosives used in the North come from the South. I have already raised the problem with Irish Ministers, who accept that better results are needed. They have recently moved to the border area a task force of armed police trained in anti-terrorist techniques. This is an advance and one we should press them to maintain. I shall continue to press them on the suggestions I have put to them for more effective police action and co-operation with the RUC, which is the only way to get evidence sufficient to operate the extra territorial arrangements. I shall follow up my recent meeting which gives me a platform from which to complain if they do not live up to their promises. I shall deploy the very real arguments of self-interest - including strictly political arguments - which ought to persuade them to do all they can against what is a common enemy. But previous experience does not give grounds for expecting substantial improvements immediately. The problem lies partly with the inadequate expertise, organisation and resources of the Irish police and partly with the historical and emotional inhibitions which some Irishmen feel against co-operating with us against PIRA.

Other suggestions have been made interdepartmentally - eg giving the Irish Army emergency powers of arrest etc such as our Army has in Northern Ireland. Many of these would take us - and the Irish - into a different dimension of policy, outside the realm of police activity and co-operation. It is hard to see how the Irish could be persuaded to accept them; and a row about them - while appealing to the hard line Loyalists - could not only cost us the present level of security co-operation but also destroy our present delicate understanding with the Irish on political matters, since politics and security are closely intertwined. I do not know of any pressure-points, in the wider Anglo-Irish area, which we could turn to our advantage. Nevertheless, my officials, in consultation with the other Departments concerned, will now make an overall analysis of the intrinsic merits and feasibility of other possible methods and measures, in the light of the Committee's conclusions on our overall political posture with the Irish.

On our own side there is a clear need for our intelligence agencies to gather as much intelligence as possible on PIRA in the Republic. A lot of preparatory work has been done on this. This work should be followed up energetically.

- (iii) Apart from the measures at (i) and (ii) - which will take time to mature, on even the most optimistic view - we need to ensure that the Security Forces are used as effectively as possible within Northern Ireland and have the resources they need. The policy is not an easy one to implement. The delicacy of the police/Army partnership is accentuated by differences in their command structure and command philosophy. An attempt to impose a dramatic structural change would be unhelpful. My immediate concern is to see that the most effective operational policy is being pursued on the ground and to resolve the questions which have arisen

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about the practical action to be taken by both the police and the army. For example, I want to assure myself that on our own side of the border we are taking all sensible measures to reduce the terrorists' freedom of movement into and within Northern Ireland: for example, through more border road closures and closer monitoring of traffic. I have commissioned an urgent study of all these matters, and I shall discuss them with the Chief Constable and the GOC later this month.

9. I recognise the Defence Secretary's need, on general defence grounds, to reduce the Army's commitment in Northern Ireland. On the advice of the Chief Constable and the GOC, I do not believe that a reduction would be justified at present. The Defence Secretary and I are agreed that force levels in Northern Ireland should be thoroughly studied, together with the practical considerations, with a view to identifying the appropriate moment for a change.

Conclusion

10. I invite the Committee:

- (a) to approve the policy outlined in paragraphs 4 - 6;
- (b) to agree I should concentrate on making fresh progress in three major areas: intelligence and surveillance; co-operation with the Irish and action against PIRA in the Republic; and operational measures within Northern Ireland, including our border areas (paragraph 8);
- (c) to note the further study of force levels (paragraph 9).

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Northern Ireland Office

5 July 1979