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August 1979


NORTHERN IRELAND : SECURITY

JOINT MEMORANDUM BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
DEFENCE

1. We have been considering together since we took office the question of improving the effectiveness of our security operations in Northern Ireland, and the quality of the help we get from the Republic of Ireland. A number of questions are still under examination but recent events have led us to bring forward certain proposals now for immediate action, as set out in the Annexe to this memorandum.

2. If these proposals have the support of colleagues, it would enable the Prime Minister on behalf of the Government to make a public statement about security in Northern Ireland on the following lines:

i. We re-assert our determination to protect the people of the United Kingdom against terrorism using all our collective resources. Our aim remains the defeat of terrorism and the extension of normal policing.



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- ii. To achieve this we have decided that some changes are necessary now. These include the creation of a new Security Directorate in Northern Ireland accountable to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

- iii. We share a common concern with the Republic of Ireland in defeating terrorism on both sides of the border. We have proposed a fresh approach to the Government of the Republic at the highest level to improve all aspects of our co-operation.

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WITH
THE COMPLIMENTS OF THE
PRIVATE SECRETARY

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
GREAT GEORGE STREET
LONDON SW1P 3AJ

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SECURITY POLICY

1. The two-fold aim of security policy in Northern Ireland is to extend normal policing and to eliminate terrorism. In some parts of Northern Ireland the two parts of the objective can be pursued concurrently, in others the struggle against terrorism predominates. Throughout Northern Ireland the Army operates in support of the civil power.

2. There is, however, a clear public expectation that the Government will be examining security policy in the light of the events of the weekend. We have done this under the following heads:

- (i) The direction and co-ordination of the security effort in Northern Ireland;
- (ii) Security co-operation with the Republic of Ireland.

The direction and co-ordination of the security effort in Northern Ireland

3. We have concluded that the present arrangements for the direction of security operations under the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland could be improved, in particular the best use is not being made of our resources and unnecessary operational problems are created. We are both agreed on the need for action here. There are a number of constraints on us:

- (a) the ultimate authority of Ministers and in particular the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland must be maintained, not least because any apparent divorce between political policy and security policy will make political progress impossible;
- (b) The Chief Constable, whose Force plays an increasing part in the struggle against the terrorists, is accountable only to the law; he cannot be made accountable either to a Minister or to any other person without legislation;
- (c) Our policy is to proceed against the terrorist through the normal machinery of law and order, and not to follow the terrorist into detracting from the normal standards: to undermine the independence of the Chief Constable, or to put the RUC under some quasi military direction, would undermine our position;
- (d) We cannot afford to abandon either the elimination of terrorism or the extension of normal policing.

4. Within these constraints we think it is possible to make a significant change in our present arrangements, which will both improve the efficiency of our operations and have public impact. There is a danger of course that any changes following last weekend's incidents will be misrepresented by the Provisional IRA for their own purposes, but as a result of our discussion in recent weeks, we are convinced that

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these changes are worth making in their own right. We can expect a large section of public opinion to welcome them.

5. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland must remain responsible for securing the implementation of the Government's policy there. But he needs to be supported by better machinery than exists at present for the conduct and planning of security operations. He has already established a new security policy group to bring together on a regular basis the Chief Constable and GOC under his chairmanship to determine security policy. We now propose additionally a new Security Directorate in Stormont under the personal direction and control of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

- (i) The Directorate would have a joint senior staff consisting of representatives of the Northern Ireland Office, the Army and the police (at Brigadier/Assistant Chief Constable level).
- (ii) It would maintain a 24 hour responsibility for monitoring developments, proposing initiatives and reporting as appropriate.
- (iii) The Directorate would be responsible for exercising central co-ordination on behalf of the Secretary of State where this is required. As appropriate, it could be augmented by more senior officers as necessary up to and including the Chief Constable and the GOC under the Secretary of State's direction.
- (iv) In conjunction where appropriate with the Director and Co-ordinator of Intelligence, it would work on forward planning of security policy operations both in pursuance of remits from the Secretary of State and on its own initiative.

A senior official would be appointed to head up the new Directorate and would be responsible to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. We would want a man of sufficient seniority and experience, perhaps of DUS rank, to be able to co-ordinate effectively all aspects of operational planning and to establish the right relationship with the Chief Constable and the GOC.

6. Co-ordination is equally important in the field. Problems arise on the ground when the security forces have to react to incidents. Quick decisions are required if both forces are to make full use of their separate resources and different skills. A working party, established by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, has agreed that improvements in communication and understanding are needed. A detailed examination is already being made of individual areas in Northern Ireland. The Working Party is likely to recommend a clearer focus on the Divisional Police Chief Superintendent as the key commander and a more positive liaison between him (and his 24 hour-a day staff) and local army units.

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7. There are other measures we could consider: some of these can be dealt with now - for instance, a unilateral decision to reintroduce detention would be politically disastrous. But other ideas would be worth re-examining within the new Directorate, including the closure of certain border roads, the proscription of Provisional Sinn Fein, more vigorous use of the SAS, increased use of the UDR, possible changes in the law against terrorism. None of these is a matchwinner, but all could be looked at again by the new Directorate. Some are already under review, together with, of course, the scope for improving our intelligence effort.

Security Co-Operation with the Republic of Ireland

8. For the defeat of terrorism it is essential that the Republic:
- (a) Make a concerted and sustained effort against terrorists in the Border areas - involving closer co-operation with the RUC, swifter reaction to incidents, and the better organised surveillance of the Border;
 - (b) Mount a sustained campaign against the manufacture of home-made explosives in the South (from which comes most of the explosives used by terrorists in Northern Ireland);
 - (c) Put a far greater effort into acquiring intelligence about terrorists, and sharing it with us - and quickly.
9. We must take the opportunity given to us by recent events to secure, in the context of our general policy, co-operation from the Irish at the highest level leading to more effective action against terrorism. We must ask them to say publicly that they are doing this.

Cabinet Office,
Whitehall,
London SW1

29th August, 1979

PS(79) 26

Dear Private Secretary,

Cabinet: Northern Ireland

The memorandum by the Secretary of State for Defence and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (C(79) 34) shown on the agenda for tomorrow's Cabinet will not be circulated in advance. Copies will be available in the Cabinet Room for each Minister attending; these copies must not be taken away after Cabinet.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries of all members of the Cabinet, the Minister of Transport and the Chief Whip.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) M. J. VILE