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*Ireland*

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NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE  
GREAT GEORGE STREET,  
LONDON SW1P 3AJ

SECRETARY OF STATE  
FOR  
NORTHERN IRELAND

Prime Minister

To note.

*W*

A.J.C.  $\frac{14}{11}$

Rt Hon Michael Heseltine MP  
Secretary of State for Defence  
Ministry of Defence  
Main Building  
Whitehall  
LONDON SW1

14 January 1983

*Michael Heseltine*

**ARMY FORCE LEVELS IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

John Nott wrote to me on 22 December. As he said in his letter, I have discussed the question of a further reduction of one major unit in Northern Ireland with the GOC and Chief Constable; most recently at the Security Policy meeting in Northern Ireland on 13 December. I fully supported the proposal which meets my policy of ensuring that the RUC continue to take a more prominent role, with the Army ready to give support when required; it was helpful to have John's explanation of the consequential changes.

I am content now therefore formally to approve a force reduction in Northern Ireland which will be effected by not replacing the 3rd Battalion, The Light Infantry when it ends its emergency tour in February 1983.

I very much hope we can ensure that this reduction and consequential redeployments do not become public knowledge in advance, but I understand that our officials are now discussing the terms of a defensive press brief in case the plans become known.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

*John Nott*

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IRELAND: SITUATION IN N.I., FORCE LEVELS: PT 13.

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