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From the Private Secretary

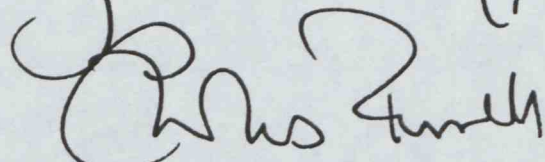
20 December 1985

Dear Richard,

**INFANTRY REINFORCEMENTS FOR
NORTHERN IRELAND**

The Prime Minister has considered the Defence Secretary's minute of 20 December about the proposed deployment of an additional infantry battalion to Northern Ireland from the beginning of January. She is content with this but agrees with Mr. Heseltine that presentation is extremely important and that a very careful line needs to be worked out in advance. I have asked Bernard Ingham to make contact with your Press Officer and the Northern Ireland Press Officer to discuss this further.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to members of OD(I) and to Michael Stark in the Cabinet Office.

Yours sincerely,

(C. D. POWELL)

Richard Mottram, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence



MO 19/3L

PRIME MINISTERINFANTRY REINFORCEMENTS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

The General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland has requested the deployment of an additional infantry battalion to the Province from the beginning of January in order to sustain the effort to meet the additional Army support which the RUC currently requires. It is proposed that this deployment would be for a period of two months, at least in the first instance.

2. The background to the request is, of course, the intensification of the PIRA campaign of violence, in particular the recent attacks on RUC stations, and the Unionist reaction to the Anglo-Irish agreement, particularly in the context of the by-elections due at the end of January. Leaving aside the provision of military resources to rebuild police stations, which has been pursued separately, it has been necessary to provide at short notice significant additional support to the RUC to assist in guarding police stations. This was essential to maintain the credibility of the Security Forces and the equivalent of 8 additional companies have been deployed since



12th December. It has also been necessary for some months to deploy 2 extra companies from resident battalions above the level which can normally be sustained in order to meet specific RUC requests for support. In order to take on these extra commitments it has been necessary to postpone the Christmas privilege leave for 4 of the 6 resident battalions; to raise the average nights out of bed ratio from an already excessive 60% to 75%; to bring in extra part-time UDR soldiers and increase both full and part-time work rates; and, finally, to cancel all training within the Province.

3. This clearly cannot be sustained for long - in particular the backlog of postponed leave is such that from 3rd January each resident battalion is due to have the equivalent of one company on leave and the increased UDR effort cannot be maintained without a formal Call-Out which would be both impractical and have highly undesirable political implications. The Chief Constable of the RUC has, however, asked for the current level of support to be maintained at least until March 1986 although he has agreed to review the situation at the beginning of the year with a view to scaling down the Army's commitments.

4. Clearly, the deployment of an additional infantry battalion would be a high-profile political move and could, for example, be seen as an indication that the Government is seriously concerned about maintaining law and order in the Province during



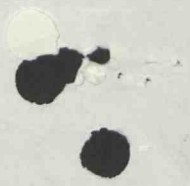
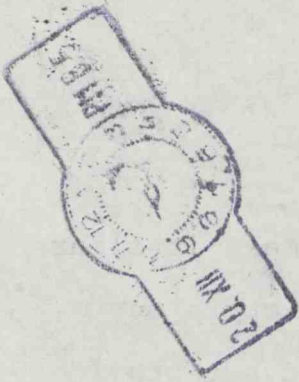
the period of the by-elections. I should also make it clear that this deployment would be to allow us to maintain our present level of effort for two months and would not provide a margin to cope with any further significant new commitments. Nevertheless, I believe that it is important to sustain the present security effort in Northern Ireland and that we should therefore accede to the GOC's present request. I understand that Tom King also takes this view.

5. Preparations are in hand to arrange for the deployment of an additional battalion, subject to colleagues' agreement, from the beginning of January, although the precise details have yet to be settled. Such a move would require careful presentation and it may be best to make a low-key announcement through Headquarters Northern Ireland (HQNI). This, and the preparation of defensive press briefing, is being discussed between the Northern Ireland Office, the Ministry of Defence and HQNI.

6. I am sending copies of this minute to other members of OD(I) and to the Secretary of the Cabinet and would be grateful to know as soon as possible that colleagues are content that we should proceed with the proposed deployment.

Ministry of Defence

20th December 1985



LONDON