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cc/c



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SECRETARY OF STATE  
FOR  
NORTHERN IRELAND

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- 1113

The Rt Hon George Younger MP  
Secretary of State for Defence  
Ministry of Defence  
Main Building  
Whitehall  
LONDON  
SW1A 2HB

11<sup>th</sup> March 1986

Dear Secretary of State,

FORCE LEVELS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

I am very grateful for your minute of 24 February in which you agreed to the deployment of a further battalion from early March.

I share your concern that this should not become an open-ended commitment. Like you, I do not wish to see a permanent increase in Army force levels in Northern Ireland. Should the Chief Constable call for additional resources, we would of course look at this most closely, particularly in the light of your views; but he has not seen a need for additional policemen, because the task at present required - the protection, although not static protection, of fixed points - is not suitable for policemen.

I am sorry if my earlier letter implied in any way that the Army protection of RUC stations was generally a very close or static commitment. Once the RUC and HQNI agreed on the threat to individual police stations, it is the Army who decide how best to discharge the task, and, as I understand it, mesh this in with their normal framework operations. We saw an excellent example of this the other day, when a shooting attack was made on the Fort George security base in Londonderry. Having heard the shots, a military foot patrol operating some distance away was able to intercept the terrorists as they tried to make their escape, with very satisfactory results. This is the sort of operation which only the Army can do well.

You raise two other specific points: the manning of border PVCs and the Prison Guard Force. We have to recognise that police operations in the border areas are just those which present

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particular difficulties for them unsupported: but I have recently commissioned a strategic look at the whole question of border crossings, in which both HQNI and HQ RUC will be closely involved. Obviously we will very much bear in mind what you say. As far as the Prison Guard Force is concerned, there is as you say an official working party in existence, and we await their findings.

I hope therefore that you will agree that we already have the machinery in place to give us the necessary information to review force levels in the summer. Like you I very much hope that we will be able to withdraw at least one, if not both, of the additional battalions by the end of September.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Prime Minister, Geoffrey Howe, Douglas Hurd and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours Sincerely  
N. Brown  
(Private Secretary)

for T K

(Approved by the Secretary of State  
and signed in his absence in  
Belfast)

Ueland; Four Levels #20

