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SECRETARY OF STATE  
FOR  
NORTHERN IRELAND

The Rt Hon George Younger MP  
Secretary of State for Defence  
MOD Main Building  
WHITEHALL  
London  
SW1A 2HB

*CSJ*  
*2/6*

30 May 1986

*Dear Secretary of State*

CONTINGENCY PLANNING

*at this*

Thank you for your minute of 22 May.

I fully take your point about the role of troops in relation to troubles in prisons. I should say that all our plans are based upon the use of RUC personnel in contact with prisoners, and the Chief Constable accepts that, however unwelcome, the task is not one which could be avoided given the makeup of the prison population in the province. It would of course severely stretch the RUC, and the assistance which military personnel could give in non-contact posts would be essential; and in addition, the diversion of substantial RUC resources would leave gaps in our security and public order defences which HQNI would have to fill as best they could.

The reference in the memorandum to which you refer was nothing more than a signal that in the worst possible case when severe industrial disruption was coupled with a prison strike, and the RUC were for whatever reason simply unavailable, we might have to contemplate the wider use of military personnel simply because there was no other option. But this "worst case" scenario is based on three simultaneous eventualities which are each in themselves unlikely and the possibility is therefore remote.

Perhaps I may also raise a smaller point in the same field. One of the effects of the recent industrial action by the POA was that a number of static guard posts at the Maze Compound Prison, normally filled by over-time working, were left unmanned for a 5-hour period

SECRET

SECRET



between 1600-2100 hours. The posts concerned are inside the prison perimeter but outside the Compound, so that there was no question of any contact with prisoners. The unfilled posts would have posed a very serious security risk, and the necessary cover was obtained for the period from the RUC (approximately 30 men).

There is obviously a slight risk, if similar circumstances obtained in the future, that POA action of this kind at very short notice could leave a gap in our defences if RUC manpower was not immediately available. Since the task is a non-contact one, it would appear that it could - in an emergency - be carried out by soldiers. Officials have discussed this with the staff at HQNI who would be quite prepared to prepare a small local contingency plan. They have however rightly emphasised that they would be quite unable to commit troops without your specific authority. I hope that you will feel that the contingency planning should go ahead so that we have a fallback position prepared. The task remains one which should fall to the RUC, and I would of course consult you in the unlikely event that circumstances meant that they could not meet it in time.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, other members of OD(I) and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Your sincerely  
Jardine U

pp TK

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

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IRLAND Situation Pt 20

