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Prime Minister

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INTERNATIONAL AIR TATTOO, GREENHAM COMMON, 23-24 JULY:
POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES BY ANTI-NUCLEAR DEMONSTRATIONS

The bi-ennial International Air Tattoo, organised by the RAF Benevolent Fund, and which I understand the Secretary of State for Defence is attending, is to be held at Greenham Common air base on Saturday 23 and 24 July and is likely to be covered extensively by the press and television. The Home Secretary thought that the Prime Minister may wish to know the current assessment from the Thames Valley Police of attempts which anti-nuclear demonstrators may make to exploit the event, and to have a summary of the policing arrangements.

The Tattoo will be held in the northern, non-operational part of the base, which will be open to the public. Upwards of 100,000 visitors are expected on each of the two days. They will be separated from the southern, operational area by two parallel lines of crowd barriers, with a 30 yard sterile area between them.

There is no current information that the Greenham Common "peace women" are planning to take action during next weekend (although it has to be said that it is often difficult to obtain intelligence of their intentions). It may be that the women recognise that the great majority of the visitors are likely to be opposed to their campaign.

Leaflets have, however, been circulated by "Cat's Cradle Action", which appears to be a new anti-nuclear group. The leaflet gives travel directions to Greenham and invites campaigners to attempt to hand out anti-nuclear literature at the entrances to the base, and in the car-parks, which will be inside the perimeter fence. The leaflet invites supporters to be good-humoured, not to disrupt the event and during it to follow any police instructions and not to obstruct the police. But it states that some campaigners, "trained in non-violent direct action", will seek to "re-claim the base for peace", by attempting to remain inside the perimeter when the Tattoo ends at 8.00 pm each day. It is said that those attempts will be watched by observers and that legal advisers will be present. The police currently estimate that about 100 campaigners will attend each day, but think that not all of them will attempt to stay after 8.00 pm.

During the Tattoo, the policing of the area of the base open to the public will be the responsibility of the Thames Valley Police, although the RAF Benevolent Fund will provide some 500 stewards. There will be no grounds for excluding anti-nuclear campaigners provided they pay the entrance fee and do not break the law. But the police are alert to the possibilities that the campaigners may not behave responsibly, or that they may excite a hostile and perhaps disorderly reaction from some of the visitors. Thames Valley will, therefore, deploy a

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total of 450 officers at the base, on a shift system providing about 200 officers on duty at any one time. One reason for deploying such a considerable number of men is that it would be difficult to provide re-inforcements quickly from other parts of Thames Valley. On past experience, there will be tail-backs of traffic on the roads to Greenham of 5-7 miles.

The Benevolent Fund are paying for the presence of about 30 officers on duty inside the northern area, who will assist in crowd direction and control and deal with any crime (there will be considerable sums of money about - the entrance fee per car is £5) but will also be alert to intelligence, or signs, of trouble caused by campaigners.

The police are also planning to deploy a reserve of about 50-60 officers outside the base, in tenting on the northern, 'public' side of the dividing barriers. Those officers will deal with any attempt to breach the barriers (we understand there will be MOD personnel on the other side, to deal with anyone who managed to get past the police). The reserve will also be available to respond to disorder elsewhere within the base or, if necessary, to re-inforce the remaining 100 or so officers who will be at the gates or patrolling outside the perimeter. Similarly, those externally deployed officers could, if necessary, act within the base. They will also be alert to any need to protect the "peace camp" from the attentions of visitors, although the chance of difficulty there seems remote: the camp is on the southern side of the perimeter, well away from the entrances on the north which the visitors will use.

If campaigners do attempt to stay inside the base on either day after the Tattoo has ended, it will fall to MOD personnel to eject them, since the property will have become private and the campaigners trespassers. Thames Valley officers will, however, be ready to assist the MOD men, in the same way that the police may assist any land-owner to remove trespassers.

We understand that liaison between the police and the military authorities remains excellent.

The police have undertaken to up-date us on Friday, and I will let you know if their assessment, and so their plans, change significantly.

I am copying this letter to Brian Fall (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence), and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Yours NH,

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