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MO 19/3E

I suggest that those to whom this minute is addressed meet for a brief discussion. My preliminary view is that the chances of such an operation being carried out successfully are so slender that the risks are high. I think the matter is not worth pursuing further.

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

MACM: NORTHERN IRELAND CONTINGENCY PLANNING

We agreed in July that contingency planning against the possibility of politically motivated industrial action in Northern Ireland should be developed further. Military planners were authorised to approach the Chairman of the Northern Ireland Electricity Service (NIES) for advice in connection with the plan for electricity supply (op CLOUT) which is likely to be crucial to the success of all the plans.

Prime Minister
You will want to be aware that this discussion has been bounded. Taking over power stations by force is

obviously very sensitive. The risks of even discussing it may outweigh any likely benefit. Content for it to be discussed (without decisions). Or prefer to veto now? CDP 17/11

2. This process has now been taken about as far as it can within the present constraints and a number of key questions have been identified which need to be answered before we can form a clear picture of the prospects for defeating such disruption. These questions involve highly sensitive political and military issues in Northern Ireland on which I would value your judgement. But I believe that we have reached the point at which, in view of the very high political stakes, it would be useful to discuss the whole subject at a meeting with those colleagues most closely involved.



PRESENT STATE OF PLANNING

3. A detailed memorandum on the present state of planning is attached. There are six plans for dealing with the maintenance of essential services (electricity, water, the docks, the prison service, the fire service and liquid fuel delivery). The last five are now considered to be generally viable in themselves, provided that a minimum level of mains electricity supply can be maintained. To an extent, the success of all these plans is thus crucially dependent on the prospects for op CLOUT.

OP CLOUT (ELECTRICITY SUPPLY)

4. A viable plan to provide a minimum electricity supply has been drawn up on the basis of the view of the Chairman of the NIES that power industry workers would be unlikely to damage the industry (or otherwise obstruct the use of Servicemen). This rests on the assumptions that senior managers stay at their posts and that selected middle managers and engineers are available either from the NIES or from the mainland. But, before we can be confident that these assumptions would stand up, further work would be necessary to confirm the feasibility of substitution for key people from outside Northern Ireland. In addition, if it were essential to avoid the possibility of an interruption of supply - which could last for up to 7 days with very serious effects on life in the



Province - it would be necessary to intervene before the supply fell to a level which caused the distribution system to shut down.

5. Although the Chairman of the NIES is confident that workers would not seek to damage the industry, military planners have to take a less optimistic view. The power workers and, more to the point, the Protestant leadership, must realise the crucial importance which control of the electricity services would hold in such a dispute. HQNI considers that if Servicemen were brought in to keep essential services going, this could precipitate reactions by hard-line workers in the industry ranging from a sit-in to sabotage action. In their view, contingency plans should cater for this possibility (even if unlikely) because of the effect which it would have on our ability to sustain all our contingency plans. The issue which therefore needs to be addressed is whether military contingency planning should be drawn up against the possibility of taking over by force (either by the police or by the Army directly) the electricity services in Northern Ireland, either to pre-empt the interruption of the supply or in the face of resistance from workers in the industry.

6. The attached memorandum describes in more detail the two basic forms which military intervention might take - a pre-emptive operation intended to avert an interruption in supply and also minimise the risks of organised resistance or intervention only after a breakdown had occurred (which might or might not meet



resistance from strikers). The first of these courses has some superficial attractions, but no feasibility study has been carried out and there are a number of formidable practical difficulties. Moreover, the political risks would be extremely high and, in particular, this course might well lead to the walk-out of essential senior management and it is at present uncertain whether substitution from Great Britain would be feasible. It might well also precipitate reactions outside the power industry.

7. Pre-emptive action or the use of force would be a major departure from normal MACM procedure and merely to draw up contingency plans for such action would be extremely sensitive both politically and militarily. Because of the political and other problems we may decide to rule these courses out now. But if we wish to have these options available in the event of a strike, some further planning is required.

CONCLUSION

8. Detailed planning has raised a number of further questions that need to be answered if we are to be confident that Op CLOUT could succeed in the wide range of situations with which we could be faced. In particular, it would be necessary to identify now some 15 middle managers and 36 engineers (and, if possible, some senior management) would would be available from Great Britain and able to take over key tasks. It is also necessary to decide



whether, at this stage, planning should include the possibilities of the use of force and pre-emptive action. In view of the security sensitivity of this planning, these questions have not so far been raised with the Department of Energy, nor has the Treasury Solicitor's Department been asked about the legal aspects.

9. We need therefore to decide:

a. Whether Department of Energy officials should be invited to carry forward the work of identifying suitable personnel in Great Britain;

b. Whether Law Officers should be invited to give a view on the legal position in the event of pre-emptive action at the start of a dispute before disruption to essential services has occurred;

c. Whether a feasibility study should be undertaken now of the practicality of taking over the power industry by force if necessary in the event of opposition by the power workers;

d. Whether military plans should include a pre-emptive operation to take over the electricity industry when there is clear evidence of the intention of power workers to disrupt the industry but before actual disruption had occurred.

SECURITY

10. The sensitivity of the subject matter of this minute is obvious, but I should draw attention to the particular risks attached to the possibilities of pre-emptive action or the use of force. If we do conclude that these should not be excluded at this stage, any leak would not only have major political consequences but would be likely very seriously to compromise the chances of such action succeeding. On the other hand, if we decide to rule out such action, a leak would remove an important uncertainty for those contemplating disruption and could thus seriously weaken our hand politically. It is essential therefore that knowledge of these aspects of our planning, in particular, is kept to the absolute minimum.

11. I am sending copies of this minute to the Prime Minister, the Lord President of the Council and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and to Sir Robert Armstrong only.

A.Y.

Ministry of Defence

16th October 1986



DA

cc PC

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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

20 October 1986

Dear John,

MACM: NORTHERN IRELAND CONTINGENCY PLANNING

The Prime Minister has seen a copy of the Defence Secretary's minute of 16 October about contingency planning against the possibility of politically motivated industrial action in Northern Ireland, and in particular the possibility of taking over by force the electricity services.

The Prime Minister agrees that this should be considered by a very restricted circle of Ministers only. Her preliminary view is that the chances of military intervention being carried out successfully are so slender, and the downside risk so high, that the conclusion is likely to be not to pursue the matter further. But she would like to hear the views of colleagues concerned once a discussion has taken place.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to the Lord President, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Northern Ireland Secretary and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours sincerely,

Charles Powell

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(C.D. Powell)

John Howe, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence.

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- NOT TO BE COPIED FURTHER WITHOUT PERMISSION _

NORTHERN IRELAND CONTINGENCY PLANNING

Introduction

1. As agreed by Ministers at the end of July, military staff planners have been working with planners in the Northern Ireland Office to develop contingency planning against possible industrial disruption in Northern Ireland in great detail. There are 6 plans dealing with the maintenance of essential services (water, electricity, the docks, the prison service, the fire service and liquid fuel delivery). Recent work has focused on two plans, Op FOOTWAY, which deals with the maintenance of water supplies, and Op CLOUT, dealing with the maintenance of the electrical industry in the Province. The other four plans have been taken about as far as they can at present and are considered viable in themselves. Nevertheless, the prospects for defeating industrial disruption as a whole are dependent to a greater or lesser degree on the maintenance of water and electricity supplies.

Op FOOTWAY (Water)

2. Contingency planning on Op FOOTWAY is well advanced and no insurmountable problems are foreseen in implementing it in an emergency provided that a minimum level of mains electricity supply is maintained. If this is not achieved it should be possible to maintain water supply in most areas using stand-by

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generators but this would not be feasible at Dunore Point, which provides 40% of Belfast's requirement.

Op CLOUT: The Maintenance of the Electricity Industry

3. The maintenance of a minimum level of electrical power in Northern Ireland is crucial to the successful intervention by troops to maintain essential services in Northern Ireland and is a precondition to the success of other contingency plans.

4. The judgement of the Chairman of the Northern Ireland Electricity Service (NIES) is that in the event of industrial action electricity workers would be prepared to maintain output at around 600Mw, which would be the minimum necessary to maintain essential supplies and domestic power only, thus cutting supplies to commerce and industry in the Province, although in the event of wide-spread industrial action their demands would in any case be much reduced.

5. The Chairman NIES considers that even if electricity workers were to embark on an all-out strike they would be unlikely to damage the industry either by active sabotage or by failure to carry out the correct operating or closing down procedures; (they did not do so during the Ulster Workers' Strike of 1974). If this were the case and there was no attempt by the power industry workers to obstruct military intervention it should be possible to provide sufficient Servicemen with the right expertise to

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ensure the uninterrupted generation of this minimum level of power. There are, however, four key assumptions:

- a. First, selected senior management would stay at work to supervise technical operations. Without senior management the Services would not have the required expertise to operate the industry.
- b. Secondly, sufficient middle management would remain at work or would be made available from Great Britain to fill some 15 key posts in the industry.
- c. Thirdly, it would be necessary to ensure that suitable engineers (some 36 in all) were available to manage the distribution system, for which the Services do not have the necessary expertise.
- d. Fourthly, Servicemen would be able to take over duties in the power stations and the distribution centres before the power output dropped substantially and the switching stations began to "trip off" automatically.

Assessment of Principal Assumptions

6. Senior Management. The assumption that senior management would stay at work to supervise technical operations undertaken

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by the Services is a fundamental requirement of all MACM planning both in Great Britain and in Northern Ireland. The NIES is confident that senior management would remain at their posts. HQNI and NIO concur with this view and planning is therefore based on this assumption. Without senior management no military contingency plan would be workable and the transfer of senior management from Great Britain has not been contemplated in drawing up contingency plans.

7. Middle Management and Engineers. It is more difficult to estimate how many, if any, middle management and engineers would remain at work. In order for sensible contingency plans to be drawn up some 15 middle managers (for the power stations) and 36 engineers (for the distribution system) would have to be available from Great Britain to take over key tasks and we would have to ensure that they would be capable of undertaking the tasks on the specific grid (which requires local expertise) in Northern Ireland. For planning to proceed with any confidence it would be necessary to identify the source for such manpower in advance and, even then, given the dissimilarity of the power industry in Northern Ireland, there could still be problems in running the power stations and distribution system. It is not known whether the CEGB would be able to identify volunteers for such a task and given the sensitivity of the subject it would be extremely difficult to raise the subject in advance without risking a serious breach of security which could have embarrassing political repercussions. This is a matter on which

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the expert advice of the Energy Department would be essential.

8. Timing of Service Deployments to Power Stations. Although the availability of senior and middle management and some engineers is crucial to the success of an operation to keep the electricity industry going, the critical, political factor in the plan is the point at which Ministers decide that Servicemen should be deployed. In a politically motivated strike of this nature, power workers could manipulate the electricity output to cause selective disruption and uncertainty. If the power output falls consistently below 600 Mw, switching stations around the Province will "trip off" automatically. Unless the contingency plan is implemented before this happens, they would have to be re-established by hand before any power could be distributed. It might take up to 3 days to restore generation from a cold start and a further 4 days would then be needed to re-establish a limited grid. During this 7 day period power supply to essential services in the Province would cease and 40% of the water supplies to Belfast (in the predominantly Catholic West of the City) would be cut off because the pumping station at Dunore Point which supplies them relies on main electrical power exclusively. The overall effect on the other contingency plans and life in the Province generally during this period could be very serious indeed.

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Summary of Present Planning

9. To summarise the present state of planning, a viable plan to provide a minimum electricity supply has been drawn up on the basis of the view of the Chairman of the NIES that power industry workers would be unlikely to damage the industry (or otherwise obstruct the use of Servicemen). This rests on the assumption that senior management stayed at their posts and that selected middle management and engineers were made available either from the NIES or Great Britain. However, before we could be confident that these assumptions would stand up further work would be necessary to confirm the feasibility of substitution for key people from outside Northern Ireland. In addition, to avoid the possibility of an interruption of supply which could last up to 7 days with very serious effects on life in the Province it would be necessary to intervene before the supply fell to a level which caused the distribution system to shut down.

Possible Worst Case

10. Although the Chairman of the NIES is confident that workers would not seek to damage the industry, military planners have to take a less optimistic view. The power workers and, more to the point, the Protestant leadership, must realise the crucial importance which control of the electricity services would hold in such a dispute. HQNI considers that if Servicemen were brought in to keep essential services going, this could precipitate a number of reactions by hard-line workers in the industry ranging from a sit-in to sabotage action. Military

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intervention might well also precipitate reactions outside the power industry. Nevertheless, in their view, contingency plans should cater for this possibility (even if unlikely) because of the effect which it would have on our ability to sustain all our contingency plans.

11. In the worst case, the power workers would not be prepared to maintain sufficient power to sustain essential services and would be prepared to resist the use of Servicemen to do so. The issue which needs to be addressed is whether military contingency planning should be drawn up against the possibility of taking over by force (either by the police or by the Army directly) the electricity services in Northern Ireland. Such a course would be a major departure from normal MACM planning which assumes that the take-over of an industry by Servicemen will be achieved with minimum resistance from the work-force. Drawing up such a plan would be extremely sensitive both politically and militarily. It is, therefore, considered that Ministerial guidance should now be sought urgently on the way ahead.

Method of Timing of Intervention

12. In the event of a politically motivated strike it is impossible to predict confidently what position we might have to face in the power industry. There is a very wide range of possibilities from the NIES Chairman's view that the workers themselves would continue to provide sufficient supply for

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essential services to, at the other extreme, the prospect of a military takeover, in the face of resistance, after the industry had already shut down. Clearly there are also many possible scenarios in between and plans would need to be adjusted to suit the precise circumstances but, from the military point of view, there are two basic forms which intervention might take:

a. Course One. The first course would be to plan on military intervention in the power industry very early in an industrial dispute to pre-empt any action by striking power workers to close down or, at worst, sabotage the electricity industry or to prevent the use of Servicemen. Such a course would hold some superficial military attractions as it could be conducted swiftly by a relatively small force and would retain the essential element of surprise. Nevertheless, no feasibility study has yet been carried out and there are likely to be a number of formidable practical difficulties. It is thought that provided a proclamation of a State of Emergency had been made it would be possible legally to take this action at the start of a dispute where there was clear evidence of the likelihood of disruption to essential services but before this had actually occurred; this is an aspect on which it might be necessary to seek the views of the Law Officers. The political risks would, however, be extremely high. The temperature of the dispute would undoubtedly be heightened and, it

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should be stressed that in these circumstances, the pressure on senior management, who are essential to any plan, could be such they would feel unable to stay at their posts. As this would render a military take-over ineffective, if the approach were to be contemplated it would be sensible to investigate in advance whether it would be possible for senior management from Great Britain to be brought in. But if the operation were successful it would give the Government considerable freedom of manoeuvre and would cause the least disruption to the general public.

b. Course Two. The second course would be for Service intervention only to take place after power production had ceased (that is, after the "tripping off" process described in Paragraph 8 had occurred). In presentational and political terms this would probably be less provocative and less risky than moving into the power stations early in a dispute before power production had dropped to below 600Mw and the legal position is likely to be more clear-cut as it could be shown that services essential to the life of the community had been seriously threatened. But the disruption of essential public domestic consumption would last for about a week before it could be restored and re-establishing the grid would be technically an extremely difficult task for the Services even assuming the help of engineers from Great

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Britain. In these circumstances the work-force would probably have the opportunity to organise physical opposition to such a take-over both inside and outside the power stations. A very large military force would be required and, even then, the chances of taking over a viable industry would be open to doubt. The success of the operation itself could be jeopardized if military intervention were strongly opposed.

Conclusion

13. Detailed planning has raised a number of further questions that need to be answered if we are to be confident that Op CLOUT could succeed in the wide range of situations with which we could be faced. In particular, it would be necessary to identify now some 15 middle managers and 36 engineers (and, if possible, some senior management) who would be available from Great Britain and able to take over key tasks.

14. It is also necessary to decide whether, at this stage, planning should include the possibilities of the use of force or pre-emption. In view of the security sensitivity of this planning these questions have not so far been raised with the Department of Energy, nor has the Treasury Solicitor's Department been asked about the legal aspects.

15. Ministers should therefore be asked to decide:

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- a. Whether Department of Energy officials should carry forward the work of identifying suitable personnel in Great Britain;
- b. Whether Law Officers should be invited to give a view on the legal position in the event of pre-emptive action at the start of a dispute before disruption to essential services has occurred;
- c. Whether a feasibility study should be undertaken now of the practicality of taking over the power industry by force if necessary in the event of opposition by the power workers;
- d. Whether military plans should include a pre-emptive operation to take over the electricity industry when there is clear evidence of the intention of power workers to disrupt the industry but before actual disruption had occurred.

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